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Faith in Action for Social Justice

THE FULLNESS THEREOF

Seeing the earth with Indigenous eyes

by RANDY WOODLEY



PLUS:

Jesus' first week home from prison

The census as a moral document

Is the Christian Right giving up on democracy?



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MAYBE YOU'VE HEARD a land acknowledgement at a conference, sporting event, or worship service. These brief statements name the Indigenous territory on which an event takes place, a small sign of respect to the people who stewarded this land for millennia and whose deep relationship to the land continues today. For any of us who've settled on that land, these statements are intentionally unsettling, a way "to counteract the ideologies operating in the Doctrine of Discovery by naming that the land was not empty when Europeans first arrived," as one group of Canadian churches put it.

But land acknowledgements become trite—an easy checkmark in the social justice box—if they are not part of ongoing relationships with local Indigenous

communities. These relationships must include settlers being quiet and listening to some hard truths from Indigenous people about history, responsibility, and reparations.

Among these truths: How our Enlightenment-bound Western worldview has distorted our relationship with the earth, divorcing spirit from land, soul from body, the mind from the material. But Jesus didn't think about the world this way, writes Randy Woodley in this issue. "He thought more like today's premodern Indigenous people."

For Woodley, a legal descendent of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma, this mind-shift toward a more Indigenous and biblical view of the earth means recognizing that our relationship with

the earth is sacred, a co-sustaining partnership. "Throughout the gospels Jesus gave creation a voice. We should do the same," writes Woodley. What might that look like? If we take our cues from Indigenous people around the world, he says, it could mean living in a way that recognizes and respects the rights of the earth.

THIS MONTH, we are pleased to feature the work of illustrator Merisha Sequoia Lemmer (Choctaw) on our cover. Titled "Salmon Woman," the original watercolor was inspired by her family member's recovery from a long illness and the simultaneous return of salmon to a nearby waterway. "The role of human beings is unique," writes Woodley, "and humans relate to the rest of creation uniquely." ■

Letters

Absentee Church

Thank you so much for Tom Roberts' "The Rise of the Catholic Right" (March 2019). This article clearly defines the issues and helps place my position in the church. It is increasingly difficult to develop as a Catholic and a Christian when we see the right wing of the church dominate the conversation. When parts of the church are always condemning and never loving, it makes it difficult to articulate the positive, loving message of my church within society. At times, it is not that people have left the church; it is that the church has left the people.

David Pitt
Kilbarchan, Scotland

Hostile Billionaires

According to Vatican II, the Catholic Church is supposed to be the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ in our time and place. Jesus' ministry was about love, healing, and forgiveness. While Pope Francis is leading the Catholic Church to become the loving, merciful presence of Jesus Christ, the hostile billionaires referenced in "The Rise of the Catholic Right" are [like the religious leaders of his day] Jesus labeled as hypocrites. It is sad that so many of

the hierarchy are fellows with the billionaires.

Thomas Spring
Wailuku, Hawaii

Cleansing the Temple

Tom Roberts' article "The Rise of the Catholic Right" was insightful and penetrating. The name Jesus is never mentioned in the seven-page article: I suspect that

There are times when it is better to divide than to hang on to a unity that lacks integrity.

Roberts is right, the name Jesus does not fit nicely into the vocabulary or worldview of these billionaires. They have no room for a Jesus who serves others and have no interest in the legitimate Catholic goals of helping to make this world more like what God intended it should be. Rather, they want self-serving control, self-enriching legislation, and self-rewarding financial favors that are achieved by dominating others. It is tragic when a legitimate, compassionate religious system is dominated by such non-Christlike forces, especially when they do it under what they see as Catholic legitimacy. Perhaps we, who are the body of Jesus in our world, need to join together

and have another cleansing of the temple!

Don Blosser
Goshen, Indiana

A Unity That Lacks Integrity

In Diana Butler Bass' "Why I Don't Fear Schisms" (March 2019), she writes: "Right now churches aren't making decisions that will matter to the American future." I disagree. I don't think Donald Trump would have been elected without the indirect support of evangelical churches. It could be possible that this branch of the church is having the same kind of impact that the mainline churches had in the past; that impact is very real and troubling. I celebrate Bass' call to courage, hospitality, justice, mercy, and faith. And I sadly agree that there are times when it is better to divide than to hang on to a unity that lacks integrity. Thanks for this important contribution to the big conversation we are having today.

Terry Cathcart
Ishpeming, Michigan

"I have something to say about that!" Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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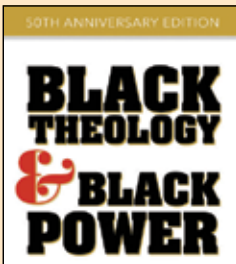
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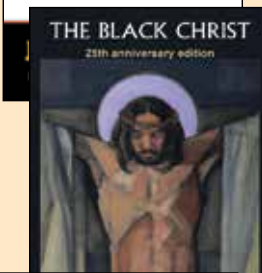


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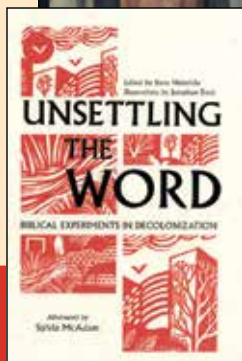


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BY JIM WALLIS

Eyes on the Prize



THE LAST TWO years have been extraordinarily difficult for many Christians in the United States who care about social justice and treating the most vulnerable as we would treat Christ himself, given the cruelty of the Trump administration toward the ones that Jesus calls the least of these.

Yet a significant change in our collective imagination is showing signs of emerging out of the 2018 midterm elections and the new public policy debates around health care and climate change, at least in the House of Representatives under new leadership. If realized, this shift could be profoundly important and hopeful for the future of our nation and our planet.

For decades now, we have lacked both the seriousness of purpose and the commitment that we will need to change the status quo on both

countries that pay a fraction of what Americans pay.

There are many ways to organize health care in a country. Some have a greater role for private insurance and some a lesser role; some rely more on government programs and subsidies than do others.

A smart, vibrant debate around how to get us from our current status quo to a place where genuinely affordable and effective health care is truly accessible to all Americans is an important one to have. The moral point is this: Health should not be dependent on wealth, and health care should be a right—for all—and not just a commodity only available to those who can afford it. Our health-care system must reflect that moral principle.

What we can't do is pretend that the current U.S. health system is anywhere close to offering what a morally responsible health system should provide to everyone in society, a system that reflects our Christian concern for treating the sick as we would treat Jesus himself.

How do we get there? It starts with the ability to envision a different future—a bold vision of what is possible in this, the wealthiest nation in the history of the world. That vision is critical for inspiring the collective imagination and creating the political will for change.

ON CLIMATE CHANGE, the reality continues to be as bad or worse than the direst predictions of the scientific community over the last several decades. The official U.S. response, as the second greatest producer of global carbon emissions, continues to be thoroughly inadequate to deal with the magnitude of the threat to God's creation and the myriad manifestations of life, which we as God's children have been asked to steward.

This is another issue where

the "least of these" from Matthew 25 already bear a disproportionate share of the impact of earth's changing climate—worsening climatic conditions are resulting in more people who are hungry, thirsty, "strangers" (migrants and refugees), naked, sick, and even in prison, and exacerbating problems for people already in those circumstances. Given that, our current lack of action is clearly not of God.

Again, there is healthy debate to be had this year, inside and outside of our political discourse, about the smartest and best ways to effect the changes in the United States and globally that will prevent the most catastrophic levels of climate change from coming to pass. The moral point is that we are called to defend God's creation—especially to stand with those who are most affected by our lack of care for the earth. Public debates should be centered on the question of how to best accomplish that task.

What we can't afford is an approach to the issue that minimizes its importance, the unacceptability of the current status quo, or our capacity to make the bold changes that the problem requires.

While politics has famously been described by some as "the art of the possible," we need to push candidates and politicians to speak with prophetic imagination about what is possible, even as we also need to push them to back up their vision with details, solutions, and a commitment to follow through.

As Christians committed to social justice, we are not called to merely put our fingers up in the air to detect which way the wind is blowing, as so many politicians and candidates for office do. We are instead called to change the wind. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

A bold vision is critical for inspiring the collective imagination and creating the political will for change.

of these issues, and changing that should be a moral imperative for Christians.

The next few months have the potential to significantly shift the terms of political debate in the United States and even reshape the public's perception of what our country can achieve on access to affordable health care and efforts to avoid the most catastrophic levels of climate change.

ON HEALTH CARE, there is simply no moral justification for the uniquely high cost of care in our country, as compared with every other developed nation, especially given that key health-care outcomes in the United States—such as life expectancy, child mortality, and maternal mortality—are worse than



Gustavo Lima/Câmara dos Deputados

Evangelical members of Brazil's Chamber of Deputies hold signs to protest the annual gay pride parade in São Paulo.

By David Kane

The Power of the 'Bible Bench'

How a right-wing Pentecostal media empire won the Brazilian presidency.

FLAVIO BOLSONARO, Brazil's recently elected president, chose as his campaign theme "Brazil above everything, God above everybody." The first phrase is a shout from his days as a military parachutist and the second a nod to the growing power and influence of evangelicals in Brazil.

According to the 2010 Brazilian census, evangelicals—who control extensive media networks and are increasingly involved in politics—make up 22 percent of the population, up from only 9 percent two decades earlier.

Churches such as the Assemblies of God and the prosperity gospel-influenced Universal Church of the Reign of God have used various forms of media to reach larger audiences, starting with local radio stations in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1989, the Universal Church bought a national television network, Rede Record. It is now the second largest network in Brazil and strongly supports Bolsonaro. Today the Universal Church owns more than 20 television stations and 50 radio stations, as well as publishing companies and studios.

In 1986, when the first election after 20 years of military dictatorship was held, the

number of Protestant lawmakers jumped to 36, with 20 Pentecostals joining the evangelical caucus. For the first time, a journalist used the term *Bancada da Bíblia* (Bible Bench). Since then, the number of evangelicals has increased in each Congress, except

The Bullet, Bull, and Bible caucuses in Congress form the basis of Bolsonaro's support.

in 2006 when several were involved in scandals ranging from a payment-for-votes scheme to the "Bloodsuckers Operation" that uncovered hospital payment fraud.

The Bible Bench's political agenda includes keeping abortion illegal and removing current exceptions to the abortion ban, such as danger to the life of the mother, pregnancies caused by rape, and fetuses with anencephaly. The Bible Bench also seeks to teach creationism in schools, lower the age for children to be tried as adults in the judicial system, and remove rights from women and minority communities, including LGBT Brazilians.

Yet "more than [these] themes, it is institutional interests that most unites the evangelicals in Congress," explains researcher Bruna Suruagy do Amaral Dantas. Concerted efforts have been made on behalf of tax-free status for churches, favorable radio diffusion laws, and national evangelical events and holidays. Evangelicals have also placed themselves on key commissions. In the last Congress, the strongest evangelical presence was on the commission that decides churches' property-tax exemption, with 17 of 21 members being evangelicals.

Currently, the Bible Bench is the third largest caucus in Brazil's Congress behind the Bullet Bench (former and current members of the police or military and others with pro-military/enforcement preferences) and the Bull Bench (big agriculture). These three form the "BBB Bench," with depressingly similar agendas at times; all are key pillars of congressional support for Bolsonaro.

While U.S. influence was important in the general proliferation of evangelicals in Brazil, the connection between evangelical

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expansion into politics and U.S. influence is not as clear. Paul Freston, a sociologist of religion, points out "there is Pentecostal growth in many countries of the world ... but only in Brazil do you have this phenomenon of benches in Congress." Instead, he notes that Brazil's "electoral system of proportional representation with open lists ... favor[s] charismatic candidates, the 'vote pullers' that are so desired by the parties. ... In Chile, for example, where Pentecostalism also grew a lot, you almost don't have evangelical politicians because it is a different electoral system."

The Bible Bench continues to grow at the national, state, and local levels, with attacks

on rights and attempts to impose "religious" mores on the state.

The Republican College in Brasilia was launched this year by the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB), a party built by the Universal Church. "The Republican Foundation belongs to the PRB, and the PRB is the first party in Brazil to have a college," said senator and Universal Church bishop Eduardo Lopes. It is the first such school founded by a political party. ■

David Kane serves with Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns and lives with his family in Joao Pessoa, Brazil.

By Jeania Ree V. Moore

Why We Love (and Hate) to Be Counted

Seeing the 2020 census as a moral document.

ON APRIL 1, 2020, the United States will hold its 24th national census, taking demographic stock of its population, some 330 million people in more than 140 million households. The census is one of the greatest equalizing forces in society, with a goal of counting each person living in the U.S. to apportion political representation through state and congressional redistricting and to allocate hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funding to states, counties, and communities. The census reflects the changing face of a nation.

Accordingly, the 2020 census will see several firsts: the first to ask about same-sex marriage, the first using an online method as the primary mode of response, and the first to request specific details on ethnic origins within racial categories such as "White" and "Black."

Many embrace the census for the opportunity it presents to redefine our national portrait. Many fear and distrust it for the same reason.

The Trump administration has proposed reintroducing a question on citizenship status that has not been on the census since 1950. Its possible inclusion has raised outcry and constitutional challenges from multiple quarters claiming that a citizenship question could lead to significant underreporting from documented and undocumented immigrant communities. Although the U.S.

Census Bureau promises that all census data is confidential and protected by law, many fear data could be shared with other government agencies to target immigrants, punish "sanctuary cities," and more.

The 2020 census also amplifies pre-existing distrust of the government. The NAACP and other groups have challenged in court the inadequate preparation for the census due to underfunding and understaffing, which risks undercounting communities of color across the country. Cybersecurity vulnerabilities in the wake of the 2016 presidential election raise additional concerns as to whether and how an accurate counting will be obtained. In the age of Cambridge Analytica, Facebook, and Russian bots, concerns about privacy and data manipulation on a national level resonate widely. The move to promote a primarily online response also raises questions about accessibility for homeless and housing-insecure individuals.

What are the pros and cons of these competing views of the census? Is the census an opportunity for gerrymandering on a national level?

The U.S. Constitution mandates a national census every 10 years. The same section of the Constitution counts an enslaved African as three-fifths of a person. The so-called "Three-Fifths Compromise," fabricated during the 1787 Constitutional Convention, prevailed in census counts for

From the Archives

May 1975

Vietnam Postscript

THE UGLY agony of Indochina is made all the more tortuous by the delusive refusal of this nation to accept the culpability for decades of a morally indefensible policy whose final failure is now being revealed.



The urge to believe that we have done what was somehow right and honorable leads us to wash our hands of any sin and then search to place on others the responsibility for the failure of American policy. So the administration blames the North Vietnamese for violating a treaty that was never initially respected by the South Vietnamese. Other diehard believers in the possibility of America's cause blame Congress, as if, after spending \$150 billion in Indochina, it came up \$300 million short of the price of success. Congress, indignant over any suggestion of contributing to the collapse of a government it regularly enjoyed castigating, simply condemns that government once again, saying our efforts have been wasted on incompetents. ...

We have refused to admit that we have been wrong. And look at the suffering that has resulted from that pride. ... These were the costs of a "peace with honor," which yielded neither peace for the people of Indochina nor any sort of "honor" for this nation. Indochina has been a malignancy in the heart of this nation. Now, faced with the demise of all our efforts, if we shun from any admission of wrong, our soul will be poisoned by such failure. ■

Sen. Mark O. Hatfield was a contributing editor to the Post American, forerunner to Sojourners, when this article appeared.

nearly 80 years, until after the end of slavery.

The Three-Fifths Compromise adjusted theological anthropology for the sake of political power, treating black personhood as a political football to settle a power grab between the antebellum North and South. This moral calculus says at least as much, if not more than, the statistical demographic data garnered by the first eight censuses about the nation at that time.

As Christians, we should look to the larger issues around the census—and not just the 2020 census results—to paint a portrait of the nation. Luke's gospel reminds

us that Jesus was born during an imperial census. This detail points to the power of empire and reminds us that God's love personified subverts this power, heralding a new way of counting people. The foundation of a moral approach to the 2020 census starts with a commitment to upholding the personhood of all. ■

Jeania Ree V. Moore works in faith-based social justice advocacy as the director of civil and human rights with the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church.

By David P. Gushee

The Trump Prophecy

Is the Christian Right giving up on democracy?

I REMEMBER THE exact day I discovered that some conservative Christians are not all that into democracy. It was 20 years ago. My daughter asked me for help with her social studies homework. I discovered that her Christian school taught a neo-Puritan civics curriculum, which proclaimed that God's design for human government is rule by "godly Christian men" applying scripture under the sovereignty of God. I was shocked.

In the Trump era, we again witness a conservative Christian flirtation with authoritarianism. These conservative Christians compare Donald Trump to Cyrus of Persia—both authoritarian rulers, both "friendly" to but not part of God's people, both supposedly used by God—and Trump is lauded as the president of divine providence in shlock films such as Liberty U.'s *The Trump Prophecy*.

Meanwhile, a quote attributed to Russian Orthodox priest and monarchist St. John of Kronstadt that "in hell there is democracy, in heaven there is a kingdom" is making the rounds on social media, occasioning much comment leaning in the direction of authoritarian rule. John of Kronstadt died in 1908 before the Russian revolution and likely associated democratic tendencies with atheism.

Why are some of our far-right U.S. Christian brothers and sisters headed in this direction? At one level, having already made the basic policy decision to support Trump in 2016, they consider any *ex post facto*

rationalization to be fair game. Their hero is an autocrat with little interest in democracy, ergo, they now support autocracy and are reconsidering their support for democracy. Trump continues to have an amazing ability to make seemingly sensible people lose their bearings.

But don't miss a Russia connection that goes beyond St. John of Kronstadt.

Russia has never managed democracy, swinging from Orthodox czarism to Soviet communism to post-communist chaos and now to Vladimir Putin's authoritarianism with strong support from the Moscow patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. Putin positions himself and Russia as defenders of Christian civilization against the decadent West. This despite the murderous and kleptocratic nature of Putin's rule.

It is easy to see a convergence between Russia's Orthodox-authoritarian-defense-of-Christian-civilization tendencies and the U.S. version of the same. The Trump-Christian Right-Russia connection, then, is not only tactical. At the church-state level, there is real ideological convergence. Both involve anti-democratic authoritarians garnering Christian support with promises to defend a "threatened" Christian civilization.

You might say that West is yielding to East. What we used to understand as "Western civilization"—which featured the long, slow development of Western

European liberal democracies out of the ashes of Western Christendom—is now challenged by an embrace of the very different Eastern European trajectory, one that moved from the Byzantine Roman East forward through 20th-century communism to today's Orthodox authoritarianism, most notably in Russia.

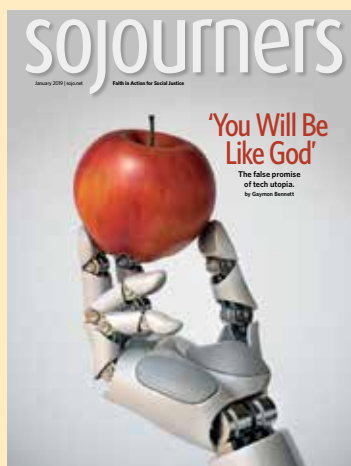
Since democracy is being attacked in the name of Christianity, it can be helpful to remember the Christian roots of the early American experiment in democracy. What was born in Philadelphia in 1776 can be seen as a Western European-Christian-Enlightenment goulash, combining a friendliness toward religion with the disestablishment of any particular version of it, the founders having learned the hard lessons of European Christendom.

That new democracy was nourished deeply by Christian scripture, but not from any paradigm of government found in those sacred pages. America would not be a Mosaic theocracy, nor a divinely sanctioned monarchy, nor anything resembling a Roman empire. Nor would the U.S. government reflect the top-down theology of government that Paul articulates in Romans 13.

But Americans *would* create a government in which realistic biblical understandings both of human worth and human sinfulness would be wired into the structure of our institutions. For example, because people have inherent dignity, are capable of self-government, and have basic rights that must be honored and protected, they can and must create inclusive democracies. These are derived from a Christian theological perception. But because humans are sinners (also a basic Christian understanding), power must be diffused rather than concentrated, a free press must be protected, and the rule of law must prevail rather than the tyrant.

Nobody ever guaranteed that our constitutional democracy would survive in perpetuity. Our generation must decide, again, whether we will continue the flawed but extraordinary experiment in self-government begun in 1776. ■

David P. Gushee is Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics and director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University in Atlanta.



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VIDEOS



Anna Sutter/Sojourners

The members of the punk band The Muslims wanted a creative outlet after the 2016 election.

A Prophetic Discord

The Muslims are an all-queer, all-Muslim punk band using their music to protest Islamophobia, misogyny, and racism. "I can find joy in the heavy stuff and I find joy in the good stuff," says QADR, the band's guitarist. "And I can balance joy and tenderness with all the rage and screaming."

Watch more at sojo.net/videos.

QUOTED

“Muslim, Sikh, and Jewish activists are eventually mentioned but serve only as a simple addendum to a conversation centered almost entirely on Christians.”

— **Harmeet Kamboj**

on media coverage of the so-called “Religious Left”
sojo.net/kamboj

VIEWS



Wayhome Studio

Who, Me? Racist?

The biggest barrier that I face when trying to address white supremacy in its everyday form is white fragility,” writes Whitney Parnell. “Fragility when I call out the harm. Fragility when I state the need for the mirror to be turned on the same people who will call out racism in everyone around them except themselves.

“From what I have learned, many white people have been raised to believe that racism is associated with bad people who see people of color as less-than. So the suggestion that they could be exhibiting racist behaviors is a shock to the system and interpreted as an attack on their character. Their fragility comes out in tears, in yelling, in denial, and in abandonment. I have known so many people to leave the work altogether because they were held accountable.

“When addressing harm with white people, they’ll often tell me that I have hurt their feelings because they’re already on my side. To them, because they are philosophically against racism, they should not be addressed when they do something racist. Worse, many believe that they can’t do something racist because they are against racism. Someone who truly understands the depths and complexities of white supremacy should understand that it is an energy against which we will have to work tirelessly. White people in particular will have to assume the humble posture of knowing that they very well could make mistakes despite intentions.”

Read more at sojo.net/parnell.

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~ Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's biographer

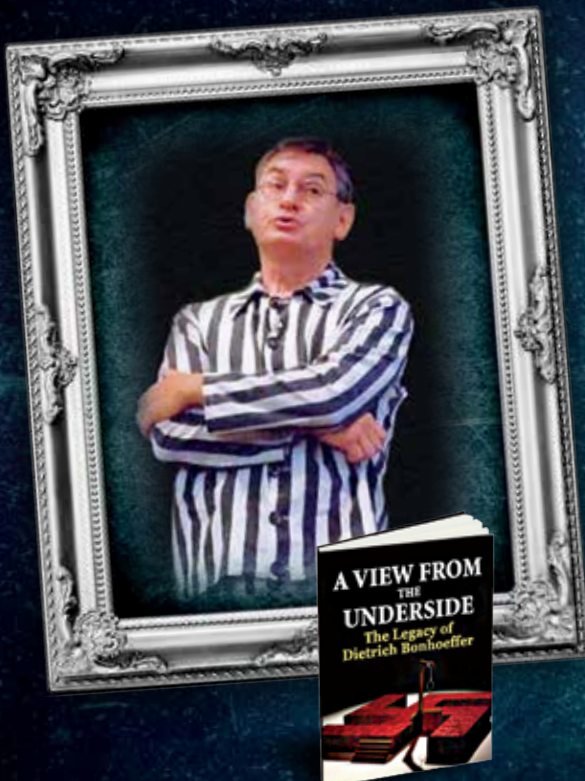
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dread of Bonhoeffer, at the same time hinting at
the ways in which Bonhoeffer continues among us
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communicate this awesome, dangerous saint
is an enormous gift among us."*

~ Walter Brueggemann

CONTACT: Al Staggs :: al@alstaggs.com
www.peacewithjustice.com







The Fullness Thereof

How Indigenous worldviews offer hope to a besieged planet • by RANDY WOODLEY

CHANGE YOUR LENSES, PLEASE. Okay, maybe you can't simply change lenses right now, but would you at least notice the lenses you are currently wearing? If you are like, say, 99.9 percent of us in the U.S., you have been influenced by a very particular set of perspectives that interpret life from an Enlightenment-bound Western worldview.

All of our lenses have various perspectival tints, but Western worldviews seem to have several in common, including the foundational influence of Platonic dualism, inherited from the Greeks. This particular influence absolutizes the realm of the abstract (spirit, soul, mind) and reduces the importance of the concrete realm (earth, body, material), disengaging them from one another. In dualistic thinking, we are no longer an existing whole.



Jesus was not an
Enlightenment-bound
Western thinker.
He thought more
like today's premodern
Indigenous people.

Western worldviews tend to have other related assumptions—such as hierarchy, extrinsic categorization, individualism, patriarchy, utopianism, racism, triumphalism, religious intolerance, greed, and anthropocentrism. But the influence of dualism empowers these other concerns.

What difference would it make if life were viewed instead as a fundamental whole, if the earth itself were seen as spiritual? And how would such a worldview square with Jesus' approach to such matters?

A few encouraging facts as we approach these questions:

- Most of the rest of the world does not understand life through a Western worldview. We in the West are the anomaly.
- Jesus was not an Enlightenment-bound Western thinker. He thought more like today's premodern Indigenous people.
- Not one writer of the scriptures saw life through a Western lens.
- Indigenous Peoples of the world have an advantage over Western thinkers in that there is still enough premodern worldview intact among North American and other Indigenous people to relate to the premodern Jesus and the premodern scriptures. They can bring new kinds of hope to today's earth climate crisis, if we allow it.

Jesus understood humanity's relationship with the earth differently than we do. He spoke to the wind, to the water, and to trees; closely observed the habits of birds, flowers, and animals; and called his disciples to model their lives after what they saw in nature. In Matthew 5, during his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is his footstool" (34b-35a).

Jesus was making a point about making vows, but one of the many byproducts we see from this short exchange (and from his whole life) is Jesus' view of the whole world, including earth and heaven, as sacred. Jesus understood the balance between the earthly and the heavenly realms, and he certainly understood the relatedness of both ("on earth as it is in heaven"). Jesus was firmly planted in the construct that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it."

The predominant themes and subject matter of Jesus' stories were natural, such as fish, flowers, birds, sheep, oxen, foxes, earth, trees, seeds, harvests, and water. There were many mechanical inventions during Jesus' time, but the record reflects he paid little attention to them. His was a world of keen observation, where God was wondrously alive and at work in creation.

In Jesus' worldview, he laid to waste the fallacies of

Platonic dualism that exist in our modern era and that presume the earth or the body or anything earthly is less spiritual than the mind, the spirit, or things more abstract. To Jesus, as it should be to us, the earth is wholly spiritual, as are our bodies.

Earth out of balance

If we remove the influence of Platonic dualism from our worldviews, we will find it difficult to view human beings as being *over* all other parts of creation. Instead of a relationship where nature is below us, we should be stewarding with, or co-sustaining, all creation.

Each area of creation is working with the Creator to maintain earth's balance. The rain and snow, oceans and sun all sustain life on earth. Animals regulate each other within their various natural cycles. Plants provide oxygen, food, and shelter for all of creation to coexist together. As human beings, we are co-sustainers with the rest of creation to ensure the abundant life for all creation the Creator intended. And God said that is good.

When considering our relationship to the earth, Christians will recognize that Jesus is earth's creator

Knowing ourselves as a people connected to the land is perhaps the single most glaring difference between an Indigenous worldview and a Euro-Western worldview.

and sustainer (John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1), and we simply cooperate with him in these tasks. Our job, as humans and as Christians, is to maintain the natural balance God set forth through Christ.

Unfortunately, things are out of balance. By allowing past and current exploitation of the earth and earth's resources, we are now reaping the consequences via the current climate catastrophes. Earth's topsoil is disappearing; coral reefs are dying; glaciers are melting; aquifers are not being recharged; animal, bird, fish, and plant species are dying at exponential rates. We are experiencing a steadily increasing amount of severe weather patterns through hurricanes, flooding, tornadoes, forest fires, landslides, droughts, and snowstorms—and the costs of these disasters continue to rise progressively each year, into the hundreds of billions of dollars. Earth is out of balance, and as a result all God's creation is in peril.

Let the Animals Teach You

But ask the animals what they think—let them teach you;
let the birds tell you what's going on.

Put your ear to the earth—learn the basics.

Listen—the fish in the ocean will tell you their stories.

Isn't it clear that they all know and agree

that God is sovereign, that he holds all things in his hand—

Every living soul, yes,

every breathing creature?

—Job 12:7-10 (*The Message*)

Karen Clarkson





Instead of a
relationship where
nature is below
us, we should be
stewarding with, or
co-sustaining,
all creation.

The road to restoration

Christians have evaded the responsibility of earth-care, due largely to the adoption and influence of a worldly philosophy. By ignoring the earth's problems, are we not responsible for dismissing the things important to Jesus in favor of our own selfish interests?

Indigenous Peoples have historically been condemned because we view our relationship with the earth to be very sacred. Like Jesus, Indigenous Peoples understand their relationship with creation as paramount to the abundant life God intends for all humanity. In other words, to be human is to care for creation. If we want to live our lives together in abundance and harmony, and if we want future generations to live their lives together this way, we must realize we are all on a journey together with Christ to heal our world. Earth healing will take cooperation from all of us to solve the problems.

The single conceptual integration of land, history, religion, and culture may be difficult for many Western minds to embrace. For Indigenous Peoples, this integration is often explained as a visceral "knowing," or as somehow embedded in our DNA.

This feeling we have of ourselves as a people, including our history and cultures, being connected to the land is perhaps the single most glaring difference between an Indigenous Native North American worldview and a Euro-Western worldview. But if we are all to survive the 21st century, things must change so that our Euro-Western friends can sense a similar connection. How does such a paradigm shift happen?

A worldview both Indigenous and biblical

Christians cannot merely leave such matters in the hands of well-meaning secular environmentalists. Although everyone should be deeply indebted to those on the frontlines of the environmental movement, many current initiatives are only helpful in the short run, because they focus on preserving earth and water for a particular use.

Unless there are guiding values that become rooted in a familial love of creation, these short-term initiatives simply may represent a more sanitized version of utilitarianism: using the earth without deeply loving the earth as sacred creation. Utilitarianism (using the earth out of self-interest, for good or bad) has been, in part, the problem.

This is where Indigenous people can be helpful. Many Indigenous Peoples understand:

■ **Creation exists** because of a Creator.

■ **Life is intrinsically valuable** *because* it is a gift from the Creator and, therefore, it is sacred, meaning that sacred purpose is crucial to our existence.

To move
ahead—perhaps
simply to survive—we
must all be connected to
Christ's creation in
harmony.

■ **The role of human beings is unique,** and humans relate to the rest of creation uniquely. This includes restoring harmony through gratitude, reciprocity, and ceremony between the Creator, humans, and all other parts of creation.

■ **Creation does not exist to be ignored** in isolation, but creation is the Creator's first discourse in which humanity has a seat of learning and in which the discourse is continuous.

■ **Harmony is not simply understood as a philosophical idea;** it is about how life operates and the only way that abundant life can continue, if life is to be lived as the Creator intends

We are now at a point in human history when we must realize that the Industrial Age has written a check to our world that has insufficient funds. Only a worldview encompassing the interconnectedness between Creator, human beings, and the rest of creation as one family will sustain abundant life.

Such a worldview is fundamentally both Indigenous and biblical. If we are wise, we will protect Christ's creation, for this creation is central to God's investment in us.

The rights of nature

There are a number of obstacles that the Western world and worldview will need to clear in order to rebalance and preserve creation, but there is one great and relatively timely action that could move us quickly down the road to restoration: We can pass laws to protect Christ's creation—not just because of the current climate crisis but because we love what God loves and we want to understand the world more like Jesus, earth's creator and sustainer.

Following the lead of Indigenous people's movements around the world, we can enact laws and constitutional amendments to protect the earth, as did Ecuador and Bolivia. More than three dozen U.S. municipalities have adopted similar "rights of nature" laws and regulations, including Pittsburgh, the largest U.S. city to do so.

Bolivia's "Rights of Mother Earth," as it is sometimes called, grew out of the World People's Conference on Climate Change held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in April 2010. At that conference, more than 35,000 people from 140 nations adopted the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth. (You can find more on the rights of nature movement at TheRightsofNature.org.)

Bolivia is one of many countries struggling to deal

with the climate crisis and its weather anomalies, such as rising temperatures, melting glaciers, numerous floods, droughts, and mudslides. Bolivia, like many other nations, is a battleground country between the rights of Indigenous peoples, especially landless peoples, and a corrupt corporate state, similar to the situation in the U.S., where corporations are legally protected "persons" but the earth that supports them has no real voice or rights.

To remind us of our intimate connection with creation and to break dualistic thinking, "action" must become an important word in Western people's vocabulary. Euro-Western people might also consider developing new ways of expressing their thanks through outdoor, earth-honoring ceremony. Through expressing gratitude in ceremony, Indigenous Peoples reveal to others and themselves the connection between Creator, human beings, the earth, and all the rest of creation.

A foundation of Native American ceremony is gratitude for the relationships that exist. Euro-Western people can rediscover what their Indigenous ancestors once knew and, in so many ways, reclaim some of their Indigeneity once again. To move ahead—perhaps simply to survive—we must all be connected to Christ's creation in harmony.

Throughout the gospels Jesus gave creation a voice. We should do the same. Would you ask your spouse to remain silent or ask them to not make their needs known? We are in a relationship with the earth and all of earth's creatures. We must make the earth's voice known and protect it by recognizing the earth's rights. Unfortunately, we have waited until this late hour to realize the sacredness of this relationship. Let's not delay until it is too late. Jesus is waiting. ■

Randy Woodley is author of Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision (Eerdmans); his podcast Peacing it All Together can be found at peacingitaltogether.com. Dr. Woodley and his wife, Edith, operate Eloheh Indigenous Way/Eagle's Wings Ministry near Portland, Ore., where he is distinguished professor of faith and culture at Portland Seminary.

Jesus' First Week



**Rereading the
resurrection with
those who have
served time.**

Home from Prison

THE WEEK OF JESUS' resurrection is his first week home from prison after a very public arrest, trial, imprisonment, and death sentence. Jesus' closest friends do not recognize him; they are frightened and mistake Jesus for everything from a ghost (Luke 24:37) to a thieving gardener (John 20:15).

by **SARAH JOBE**

Biblical interpreters have spent thousands of years trying to make sense of why the seemingly joyful event of Jesus' resurrection is haunted by unrecognition. Many have presumed that Jesus rises from the grave with a body that is somehow different—flesh that bears the marks of the execution but has somehow been transformed. If Jesus has come back with a changed body, the argument goes, then the fear and lack of recognition that his disciples show toward him make sense.

Gearstd photo illustration



Perhaps. But after many years of friendship with people who have been locked up and released, I have come to see that the stories of Jesus in the wake of his resurrection look startlingly like the experiences of every other formerly incarcerated person in the wake of his or her release. Miraculous bodies and transfigured flesh are not needed to explain the fear and awkward renegotiation of relationships that pervade the Easter stories: Jesus is home from prison, and his church simply doesn't know what to do with him.

Prison changes you

The first time I read the resurrection as a story about Jesus' re-entry, I was a chaplain sitting on the linoleum floor of a double-wide trailer at the back of a women's prison. I was with members of the prison's dance ministry. We had

weight in prison—a combination of living both drug-free and at the mercy of what was available at the canteen.

The laughter dropped when she shared that at her children's last visit, it took them a moment to realize their own mother was standing before them. We talked about what it would be like to go home soon, a changed person, and not be recognizable to your closest friends and family.

We also wondered what it would be like to be second-guessed, feared, and to have to prove yourself. All four gospels mention that Jesus' friends are filled with fear at his resurrection (Matthew 28:4, 8, 10; Mark 16:5, 8; Luke 24:5, 37; John 20:19). We noticed that, in these Easter stories, Jesus is constantly telling people "Peace. Peace. Peace be with you," whenever he comes into a room. Jesus takes the initiative to dispel everyone else's concern about his presence among them.

We talked about how Jesus is brave and vulnerable to share the story of what happened to him by showing his hands and his feet—the scars of his incarceration—over and over again. Jesus was willing to speak openly about his



dedicated our Eastertide devotionals to the resurrection stories, and in that circle of women who were getting ready to be released from prison, I realized how common these experiences of Jesus really are.

We had just read John 20:1-18, the story of how Mary finds the tomb empty, and yet when Jesus comes to stand before her, "she did not know that it was Jesus" (20:14). I asked the group why one of Jesus' closest friends and followers might not recognize him. A woman who I will call Tammy shared how just that week, right before her phone time cut off, her mother told her how proud she was of the changes Tammy had made in her life.

"You don't even seem like the same person," Tammy's mother had said.

"I know that's right!" our dance leader, Jean, said in response. "I've changed so much I can barely recognize myself."

As we talked, I realized that the dance team members were not speaking in hyperbole. Prison had changed each of them in radically painful and positive ways. One woman had been in for more than 20 years. In that time, she had only been visited by two family members; she knew she would not be recognizable to the others when she was released. Another woman laughed at how she had put on

incarceration so that others could know him for who he is, and this group of women was committed to doing the same.

Unrecognizable

In Matthew's telling, there is no way to forget that Jesus has a record; the gospel makes clear that Jesus' release from the tomb is a continuation of the story of his involvement with the justice system. The reader is given details about the security measures taken at the tomb, the guards posted where Jesus' body is being held, and the process by which these safety and security measures were decided.

In Matthew's gospel, the resurrection smacks of the criminal; it is called a "deception" pulled off by Jesus, the well-known "imposter" (27:63-64). Jesus is imagined as a con man running one last con. After a quick 10 verses about the resurrection itself, Matthew describes what is essentially a government cover-up—the payoffs and instructions that create an official story concerning how Jesus managed to disappear from his state-supervised tomb (28:11-15).

While Matthew tells the story of Jesus' release from a government perspective, John and Luke highlight the personal and relational aspects of Jesus' return to his family and friends. In both gospels, Mary Magdalene is lifted up as one who stands with Jesus throughout his incarceration, even standing at the foot of the cross during his public execution (John 19:25).

Jesus is home from prison, and his church simply doesn't know what to do with him.

Unsurprisingly, the one who stuck by Jesus while he was in prison is the first to come and care for his body after his death. Yet somehow, even with Mary's faithfulness to Jesus, not only does she not recognize him, she mistakes him for a thieving gardener. John 20:15 says: "thinking that he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him.'" Mary does not recognize Jesus until he looks her in the face and speaks her name.

Mary is not the only one who cannot recognize Jesus. In Luke's telling, Jesus appears to two unnamed disciples on the road to Emmaus. He walks and talks beside them, and they cannot see Jesus for who he is (24:16). Immediately after this, Jesus appears to the disciples as a group, and Luke tells us "they were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost" (24:37).

Jesus needs space

Many of the women who sat with me several years ago in that double-wide trailer are out of prison now. We recently had something of a reunion, gathering for breakfast and Bible study at my house. Over French toast casserole and pot after pot of coffee, we returned to these stories of what it was like for Jesus to get out of prison.

Some of us had not seen each other since release. We started our readings with laughter, humor easing the way into deeper waters. We laughed our way through Luke 24:36-43, the part of the story where the disciples could not recognize Jesus and he responds with, "Do you have anything here to eat?" The women remembered how much time they spent thinking about that first meal out.

While we were still laughing, a woman named Veronica, who had been our choir leader on the inside, shook her head and said, "They're scared of him, and he just wants something to eat!"

Her joke hit close to home. Jesus' experience—just wanting to eat with his church friends but being received with fear instead—was shared by nearly every woman in the room. As our laughter trailed off, the stories came tumbling out. They talked of showing up to church only to have their motives for coming to church questioned. One woman told of how the church members assigned to encourage her in her re-entry had expressed surprise when she got herself to church all by herself rather than asking one of them for a ride.

"It's like, they believe you, but they don't believe you," said Loyane.

Lu chimed in, "Some people receive you and some people are like, 'I gotta check you out.'"

Many of these women are in formal mentoring relationships with Christians who have volunteered to help them through their re-entry process. They expressed how valuable these relationships are, but they also told stories about the doubt and misperceptions that often seem to be lurking just below the surface.

"If I don't call you for three days, that doesn't mean I'm on drugs," said one woman, "it means I'm busy at work!"

The misperceptions are not always about fear. Women expressed that sometimes people do not know how to receive them because of how well they are doing. The misperception is that formerly incarcerated people need more help and guidance than they really do.

"Every Christian helper who has been sent my way can't seem to understand that I've done 27 years in prison, I have a solid walk with Christ, Bible knowledge, and a college education. They are amazed at this stuff, and they don't know how to handle me. They can't save my soul or get me an education. I just need clothing and companionship," said Deb.

Jean and Veronica, always leaders among us, were the ones to name how much it hurts to be misunderstood. They described being furious, tearful, and devastated.

And for the first time in my reading of Jesus as being a formerly incarcerated person, I noticed that Jesus gets mad about this stuff, too. Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus "rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe" (16:14). When Mary finally recognizes Jesus in John's gospel, he tells her to back off. Jesus needs space—even from his closest supporter—when she falls into the common trap of not being able to see him for who he is (20:17).

Continued on Page 32



A church in the nation's capital uncovers its white supremacist roots.

by KIMBERLY BURGE

Remembrance...

FOR A GOOD SIX MONTHS, I didn't notice the words carved above the grand sanctuary entrance to Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. The letters stand guard over the doors like sentries: Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The words meant nothing to me.

In February, the General Conference of the UMC voted to strengthen the enforcement of denomination rules against ordaining LGBTQ Christians and performing marriage ceremonies for LGBTQ couples. But Mount Vernon Place (MVP) has long described itself as “young and old, gay and straight, liberal and conservative, housed and unhoused, people filled with faith and people who know doubt.” It struck me as a place I could fit in and be challenged.

On my first visit, I was intrigued by a bulletin notice announcing the launch of a racial-justice book group—especially since the congregation is predominantly white. So I joined.

Book group leader Caroline Anderson-Gray, white and in her 30s, has been a member at MVP for four years. I asked her why she started MVP's racial justice conversation with a book group.

“In the summer of 2016, as reports of police officers killing black citizens seemed to be at the top of the news every other day, our minister raised the idea of a racial-justice reading group,” said Anderson-Gray. “I believe that to be Christian is to be committed to dismantling structures of hatred and inequality, so a reading group on the subject of racial justice at church made a lot of sense to me. By the time we had our first meeting, the presidential election had occurred, and the need for such a group was more urgent than ever.”

A book group may not seem like much given the rise of social terror. But small discipleship groups are a very Methodist practice—and this one opened a space

for transformative conversations. Eight to 12 people, a microcosm of the church, gathered every other month to read and learn. One man, a Canadian expatriate, spoke about his difficulty in understanding his new country considering the experiences of his African-American husband. Una Song, an MVP member for three years, said that reading Patricia Raybon's *My First White Friend* helped Song clarify her own experiences of exclusion in a country dominated by white privilege.

“Throughout my life, I've always felt like an ‘other,’ not accepted as being fully American even though I was born and bred here. I could relate to that feeling of not being fully accepted by whites,” Song said. “People would ask me where I'm from and they don't want to hear California. They want to hear Korea, but that's where my family is from. What they're saying to me is you're not from here.”

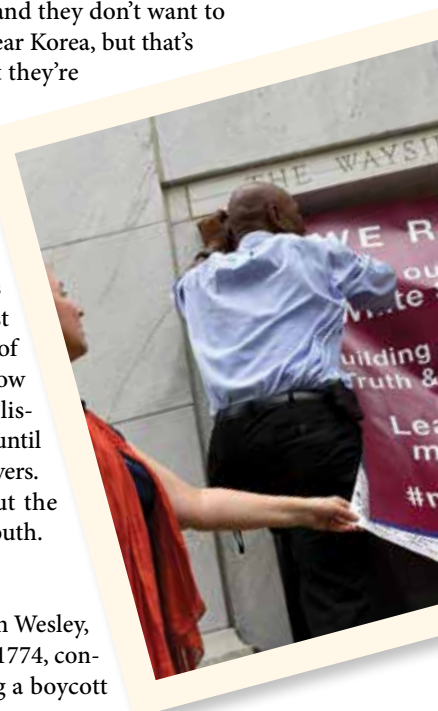
The group worked through books by Ta-Nehisi Coates, James Cone, and Michelle Alexander. The Holy Spirit and our denomination's guidelines led our efforts: “We cannot just be observers. So, we ... call each of us into a response, no matter how controversial or complex.” We listened, learned, and challenged, until we could no longer just be observers.

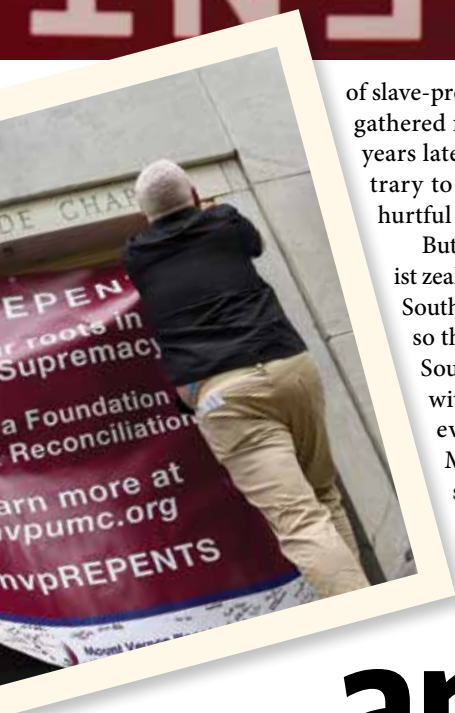
That's when I learned about the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

The past is not past

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, wrote “Thoughts on Slavery” in 1774, condemning slavery and proposing a boycott

Photos by Katherine Frey/The Washington Post





of slave-produced sugar and rum. When Methodists gathered for the first time in the United States six years later, they also condemned slavery as “contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society.”

But not every Methodist caught the abolitionist zeal. In 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South splintered from the greater denomination so that its members—some 500,000 across the South—could defend slavery while remaining within the church. Between 1846 and 1861, every person elected as a bishop for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was a slaveholder. The denomination remained separate for nearly 100 years, through Reconstruction and much of the Jim Crow era, only reuniting with two other

branches of Methodism in 1939; this larger denomination then became part of the United Methodist Church in 1968.

Mount Vernon Place was founded in 1850 as a congregation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in the nation’s capital, a federal district that had been carved out of two slave states, Maryland and Virginia.

In October 1917, the MVP congregation laid the cornerstone for a grand, Georgian-style building in the heart of the nation’s capital. In the 1950s, church membership was in the thousands. By the end of the 1960s, that number had plummeted, especially following unrest in the city after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

During the 100th anniversary service at Mount Vernon Place United Methodist Church, parishioners sign a banner repenting of the church’s roots in white supremacy. At left, the banner is hung outside the church.

...and Repentance

“Race relations has always been the work of white folks, but white folks haven’t seen it that way.”

I found a curious disconnect between what was recorded by MVP’s historian in 1977 about the life of the congregation and what was happening across the city and country.

For instance, on slavery: “The Methodists were simply a part of the country and therefore a part of the division. All of the Southern states passed laws forbidding emancipation. The Southern Methodists took the position that, ‘We must obey the law.’”

And this: “Although Mount Vernon Place did not create the problems, the church had to deal with them. For instance, the Civil War of 1861-1865 brought our little church to its knees. A century later during the 1960s the changing contemporary society and the social order of our country created vexing conditions which were national in scope. Churches, including our own, faced social unrest of youth, civil rights, impact of urbanization and moves to suburbs, the Vietnam conflict, and skepticism of traditional religious values by both young people and adults. Our membership and church attendance declined. Youth activity dwindled. Members feared crime possibilities, especially at night time. Mount Vernon Place Church could not seem to find a corrective answer to its tribulations.”

These summations are framed in a way that seeks to absolve the congregation from societal injustices—as though the world beyond the sanctuary wasn’t made up of actual people, some of whom worshiped inside the sanctuary. For more than a century, those “vexing conditions” caused tribulations for many lives outside MVP’s grand sanctuary entrance.

Starting the Conversation

The reading list for the Mount Vernon Place UMC racial-justice book group:

- *My First White Friend*, by Patricia Raybon
- *Between the World and Me*, by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, by James Cone
- *The Blood of Emmett Till*, by Timothy Tyson
- *Evicted*, by Matthew Desmond
- *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, by Charles M. Payne
- *Tears We Cannot Stop*, by Michael Eric Dyson
- *The New Jim Crow*, by Michelle Alexander
- *Reconstructing the Gospel*, by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove
- *The Color of Law*, by Richard Rothstein
- *The Hate U Give*, by Angie Thomas
- *White Fragility*, by Robin DiAngelo
- *Heavy: An American Memoir*, by Kiese Laymon

Lamenting a history

In summer 2017, MVP members once again faced “vexing conditions” as white supremacists marched in Charlottesville, Va., to protest the removal of Confederate statues. One of those young white men murdered counterprotester Heather Heyer. This time, MVP chose to connect the past to the present.

In October that same year, Mount Vernon Place marked the centennial of laying the church’s cornerstone. During the Sunday morning service, MVP pastor Donna Claycomb Sokol led the congregation in a litany of remembrance and repentance: “We lament a history in which people valued property over people. We lament the ways in which this church contributed to the wounds of an entire nation. We lament the proclamation of white supremacy and the belief that such a proclamation is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Together, we publicly repented, echoing our baptismal vows: “We repent of every way in which we have failed to reject racism that denies the dignity of anyone, choosing to instead participate in, gain privilege from, or remain silent in the face of injustice in our judicial system, our educational system, and our economic system.”

Church members were invited to add a signature of their commitment on a large banner that would hang prominently on the church’s exterior: “We repent of our roots in white supremacy. Building a foundation of truth and reconciliation.”

Adults and children lined the aisle waiting to add their names. Johnnie Richardson, security concierge for the church, hung the banner outside after the service—and added his signature.

Six weeks later, the banner would be defaced for the first time.

Ongoing repentance

For Methodists, repentance is turning away from behaviors rooted in sin and toward actions that express God’s love. It’s also ongoing.

“Repentance is never one time,” said Claycomb Sokol. “It’s this constant evaluation and prayerful eyes-wide-open look at what’s happening in the wider world. Where do I see injustice and oppression and then how am I called to respond to that? In many ways, the easiest thing we did was to sign and hang the banner. But how do we keep holding up that message regardless of how many people want to pull it down?”

The most notable defacement of the banner was the first. In the night, someone covered the banner with several printed copies of “alternative” 10 commandments. The lines included: “Thou shalt not let *The New York Times* determine the Christian agenda. Thou shalt not embarrass white people with this kind of weak,

historically ignorant bullshit. Thou shalt not enlist God in the political battles of this world.”

The church also received phone calls and emails thanking MVP for its public message. Pictures of the banner popped up on social media. Claycomb Sokol told our church’s story to a crowd at the Martin Luther King memorial on the 50th anniversary of King’s assassination.

A few people left the congregation over the following months. Some said they were caught off guard by the banner and what they called a politically charged tone they didn’t appreciate.

Meanwhile, 20 people—about 15 percent of MVP’s weekly attendance—signed up for a six-week study on racial justice. Then another group began meeting to discuss “Seeing White,” a podcast series about race and white privilege produced by Scene on Radio.

‘Cousin churches’

Through the book group, I’ve come to know Carol Travis, 72, who worked on the MVP staff for several years. Travis is a member of Asbury United Methodist Church, a predominantly African-American congregation two blocks from MVP. She’s also an avid reader. MVP’s book group lured her in, along with her understanding of the history and congregation at MVP.

“Knowing what I know about [Mount Vernon Place], I knew there would be few people of color in this book club,” said Travis. It was important to her for other members to hear from that perspective.

Asbury is another D.C. Methodist church with a complicated history. It was founded in 1836 by black members who had left Foundry Methodist Episcopal Church, where they had been treated as lesser congregants, forced to sit in the balcony for worship and denied opportunities for full inclusion.

In 2002, Foundry (now known as Foundry United Methodist Church) conducted a walk of repentance from its building to Asbury, where church leaders and members received them. A few weeks later, Asbury members walked to Foundry and bestowed forgiveness. Travis affectionately calls the two “cousin churches.”

MVP and Asbury might be called distant relations. Travis grew up in the Asbury congregation and walked past MVP each Sunday to attend her church, but she can’t remember any interactions between the two communities during her youth. “We did not go where we historically were not welcome,” she said, though she adds that Asbury nurtured her to such a degree that she had no need to seek out another community. In more recent years, MVP and Asbury have held joint worship services and shared outreach events. But a distance greater than two blocks remains.

As an African-American woman and lifelong D.C. resident, Travis recalls the tribulations of the 1960s



The Washington Post

**“Repentance
is never
one time.”**

**—Pastor
Donna
Claycomb
Sokol**

referenced by the MVP historian. “The 1968 riots had a huge influence on this place. Whites were afraid to go into the city. For us blacks, Dr. King was our hero, and when he was gunned down, people didn’t know what to do with their anger and fear. They didn’t know anything else than to go after their own neighborhoods. It was a frightening time to be in the city. Black people were looting and burning up their own neighborhoods. People didn’t have the language to discuss race relations as they do now,” Travis said.

Do we have that language now? I’m not sure we white people do. I’m still learning it. I’m not sure churches have that language either. When conversations become too painful or uncomfortable or difficult, it is still easier to shut them down rather than hang in for the hard work. Travis agrees. “Race relations has always been the work of white folks, but white folks haven’t seen it that way,” she said.

Repentance, thankfully, provides an avenue to keep working at it. Mount Vernon Place’s journey has prompted my own—exploring white supremacy and racism in my own family, starting with Moses Henegar, my great-great grandfather, Confederate soldier in the Alabama 6th infantry, and Baptist preacher. He’s mine to claim, take responsibility for, and turn from.

Poet Nikki Giovanni said, “If now isn’t a good time for the truth I don’t see when we’ll get to it.” In the body of Christ, we can repent, take up our responsibilities together, and allow the truth to set us free. ■

Kimberly Burge is a Sojourners contributing writer and author of The Born Frees: Writing with the Girls of Gugulethu, about girls growing up in post-apartheid South Africa.

Never Good Enough

The shame of being poor can linger long after poverty is left behind.

by RYAN J. PEMBERTON

I WAS FILLING my coffee mug at a church lunch when I was greeted by a woman with a smile I couldn't miss nor soon forget. Her short blond hair was pulled back under a red hat. She wore an oversized black T-shirt as a dress. A few lonely teeth protruded from her lower gums when she grinned.

Speaking fast, as though we might get cut off at any moment, she reminded me that we'd met when I'd first arrived in Berkeley, several years before. She asked if I would pray for her.

"Sorry if that's presumptuous," she apologized.

"Not at all," I said. "I'm sorry, but would you remind me of your name?"

"Kim. And yours?"

"Ryan."

"What's your last name, Ryan?"

"Pemberton."

"Oh, a very WASP name!"

"That's not me," I told her abruptly. "I'm no WASP."

What began as a prayer request soon devolved into a debate about Jesus' divinity. In the back and forth, Kim referred to me as a WASP several more times.

"That's not me," I corrected her each time. "We're not all as we look, you know."

Driving home, my mind was stuck on my frustration with Kim and, specifically, my rejection of the label "WASP." I am white and of Anglo-Saxon descent—mostly English. I am Protestant, even. But WASP still carries connotations of wealth—especially inherited wealth—that do not fit me.

Yet for much of my life, I would have been reassured if someone thought I was a person of means and status. Why was it urgent to me now to reveal the very thing I had spent the past three decades hiding?

Living in shame

As the oldest child in a single-parent family in the far Pacific Northwest, in a small town where dairy cows outnumber people 10-to-1 and the lone, blinking stoplight is more of a luxury than a necessity, I did my best to hide our family's poverty.

Just off the driveway was a shed where we stored our garbage. Trash collection was another expense. Maggots tumbled out from black plastic bags when I opened the door just wide enough to heave another trash bag atop the pile. We never spoke of it.

In elementary school, I waited anxiously in line for the woman who took money for "hot lunch"—Mrs. Price, aptly named. I faked surprise when she told me, in a voice loud enough for my classmates to hear, that I had already charged too many lunches.

"How long are we going to have to use food stamps?" I asked on a drive home from the grocery store one afternoon. The look I received assured me I would not ask this question again.

College for me, as it is for most people, was a revelation of my identity. I was preparing for a developmental psychology lecture when I read that Head Start is a school-readiness program for children from low-income families. I had always assumed everyone went to Head Start.

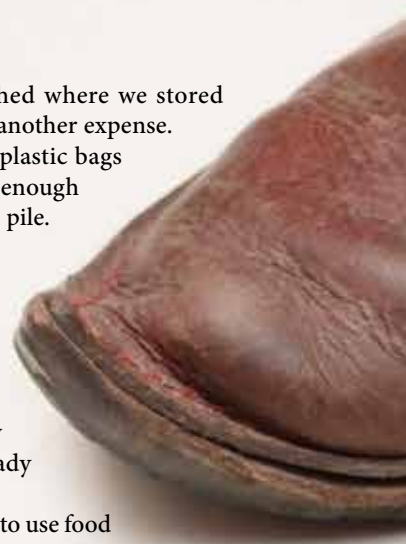
My face turned red. I turned the page quickly, hoping not to be found out.

GROWING UP, I did my best to dress in a way to hide that my family was poor.

I didn't understand friends who bought clothes at thrift stores to wear with irony or even pride. How could a used-clothing store be a place for fun? The weight in my stomach when my mom took us to Value Village stuck with me well into adulthood.

When my wife and I were first married, she bought clothes she thought would look good on me from stores I refused to frequent myself. That didn't last long. She would grow frustrated when a garment hung, unworn, in my closet.

"You think you're too good," she would say, knowing something of my childhood, but not the depths of how it had formed me. "Too good"—for clothes, yes, but also for





If poor is who I am,
then no amount of money
will bring resolution.

restaurants, or for schools, when it came time to apply to graduate programs. Anything that might reveal that I had grown up in poverty and wasn't worthy or capable of better.

I'd get quiet, not knowing what to say.

Did she know it was only because I was trying to hide? I wonder now. Did I know?

An identity, not a status

I don't talk like someone who came from poverty. As a 30-something with an education that includes top-tier universities on both sides of the Atlantic, my vocabulary hides my upbringing well.

But that's not quite right. The word "poverty" betrays my education. Poverty is not the language used by those who live in it. Growing up, we did not "live in poverty." We were poor. And that is precisely the problem. Poverty was not something we were in so much as something we were.

Poverty is conditional. It is circumstantial. But being poor? That's ontological. It shapes who we are. It becomes our nature.

Somewhere along the way, I came to believe the lie that I was poor.

This realization set in fully my freshmen year of college. I attended a private university in the Pacific Northwest, thanks to a combination of academic scholarships, loans, and working in the dining hall.

I shared a room with another Ryan, also the oldest of three, whose favorite band was also Dave Matthews (it was the early 2000s), and who was also dating a Jen. We'd laugh at each new parallel discovered as the year began. But all those similarities didn't matter. Our class backgrounds eventually divided us.

Although I earned all A's, I came to the painful realization at the end of that year that I would not be able to return for my second year. When my academic scholarships ran out, I would be returning home: moving in with my grandparents and transferring to a public university. Before I was even finished packing my things, I watched someone else move into my role as Ryan's roommate, someone who shared with him what I did not.

I am poor, I knew then, and they are not.

It is the lie I still believe at times.

Never fully at home

For as long as I can remember, I have tried to outrun this feeling of being poor. *I may not be the smartest*, my subconscious told me, *but I can work the hardest*. If I work hard enough, perhaps I can prove my worth. And if I succeed, maybe my children won't have to.

My efforts have paid off, with multiple books to my name, degrees with honors from Oxford and Duke, and relationships that far exceed the social location of my birth.

And I have the privilege of doing work that provides for my family, that I find meaningful, and that brings life to my life.

But the effort to outrun the ontology of poverty has not served me well. It has formed me in harmful ways. I have always been working to "earn it," always hiding. When I enter a room, or if I stick around long enough, I still fear being found out—like that embarrassed boy in the university library reading about Head Start. Or the young boy in the lunch line, just wishing Mrs. Price would speak quietly.

This need to hide makes me feel as though I'm never fully at home. And I know I'm in good company.

"Now that I'm a writer, now that I'm a professor, now that I'm 37 and still happily single—the fact that I'm gay

is one of the least queer things about me," Vanderbilt professor Justin Quarry wrote recently in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. "What I was most surprised to learn in that meeting [with other faculty

and staff who are first-generation college graduates] was that nearly everyone present reported that their working-class status had had a greater impact on their experience as undergraduates—for some of them, on their entire lives—than did any other aspect of their identity, including race, gender, and sexual orientation."

I serve on staff at an affluent, historic university church in Berkeley, Calif. I appear to be an insider there—but I regularly feel like an outsider.

When the students I work with as the university minister mention extensive summer travel plans, I'm reminded that our family never traveled farther than our car could take us. Unreliable as it was, we didn't go far.

When I hear about students' internships, I'm reminded of summers spent driving nails in dairy barn frames, not to build a career but to pay for a degree.

Whenever congregants ask where we live, where our kids go to school, or whether we're renting or buying our home and cringe at the answer, I'm reminded, *we don't belong here*.

On a recent trip to a conference with two friends from church, one, whom I love and respect deeply, said, "We're all pretty much from the same class background at First Pres."

I didn't know how to say, "Not all of us."

My frustration with Kim's insistence that I was a WASP, I'm realizing, was that she was labeling me contrary to how I see myself. Part of my agitation was my dissonance with the socio-economic insider status she ascribed to me, a status I tried to resist, perhaps for the first time in my life.

The trap of ceaseless striving

"When are you going to come out of the closet?" my friend Claudia asked as we drove to a retreat center one autumn

When I enter a room,
or if I stick around long enough,
I still fear being found out.

afternoon two years ago. She was referring not to my sexual orientation but to the poverty of my childhood and the dangerous ways it still shapes me.

"You need to protect your son," she told me, knowing that my hiding has not always served me well, as I strive ceaselessly to do more, accomplish more, and, ultimately, *be* more. She knew this drive for achievement as a cover for self-worth risks harming my children.

I had no words. Only tears.

The ways in which I've been misshapen by my relationship with money growing up will not be changed merely by having more of it. If poverty is something I'm in, then more money can help get me out of it—however nebulous the parameters of "it" are. But if poor is who I am, as so many experiences have taught me, then no amount of money will bring resolution. Not to me, not to my children.

While financial challenges are a genuine struggle for most young families in the Bay Area, the greater harm for me has come in the striving to earn my sense of self-worth, always just out of reach.

To help my children avoid this trap, I will need to offer them an alternate understanding of who they are, one that reorients the relationship between money, identity, and how we see one another.

Seeing and being seen

In the Book of Acts, two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and John, are heading to the temple for worship in the wake of their Lord's resurrection and ascension.

It's 3 in the afternoon when they're stopped just short of the temple entrance. A man is begging those entering for spare change. Lame from birth, begging is his way of life. It's fair to assume it has become his identity in this community.

The man asks Peter and John for some change. He sees them only as an opportunity for an economic exchange. We're told that the two disciples looked "intently" at the man. "Look at us," Peter says. It is an odd request. Presumably he's already looking at the two men; he's just asked them for money.

But the beggar listens. He fixed his attention on them, "expecting to receive something from them." "I have no silver or gold," Peter finally says. "But what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." Taking the man by the right hand, Peter "raised" the beggar up, and he began to walk, for the first time in his life.

We are often blind to our neighbor—either because we hide from one another, as has been my custom, or because we are too preoccupied. Cues of clothing or vocabulary become visual or auditory shorthand, further distorting our vision. But this exchange from the temple stairs offers an alternative. Seeing and being seen in a way that is neither dependent on our economic need nor an opportunity for economic gain is a prerequisite to authentic relationships—relationships that offer

vulnerability, healing, and even resurrection.

To see one another from outside the all-consuming economic cues that press upon us and constrain our vision provides space to see and receive Christ's work in and among us, perhaps for the first time. And for those caught up in God's inbreaking resurrection, such vision is no longer reserved for those privileged enough to not "see" class. This is the reality God is bringing about in our life together: seeing one another as neighbors, and sharing what we have, even if we don't

have much more than eyes to see, ears to listen, and a helping hand.

"And he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God" (Acts 3:8).

Seeing and being seen, Peter, John, and the man who had been begging entered into worship together.

THREE MONTHS after that awkward encounter with Kim, I saw her again.

"Will you pray for me?" she asked, just before I stepped into the sanctuary for a Sunday afternoon all-church meeting.

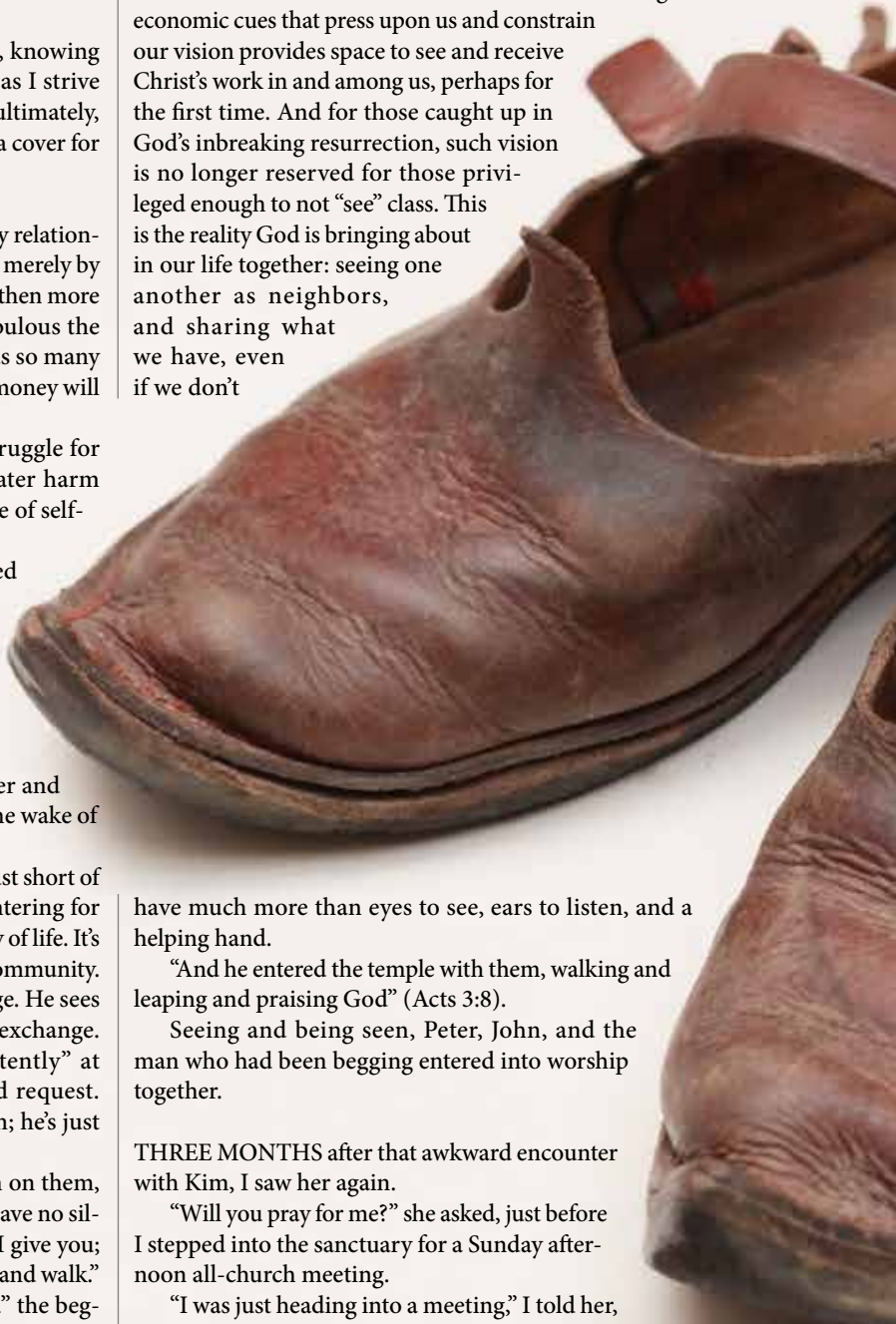
"I was just heading into a meeting," I told her, mindful that I was already late.

"So, you won't pray for me?"

For the next 10 minutes, I listened. Then I laid my hands across the table between us, palms up; she placed her hands in mine, and I prayed.

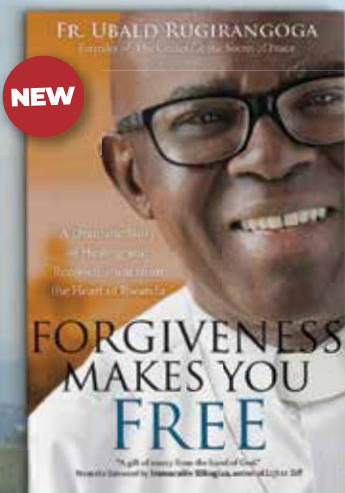
I can see that you don't feel like you belong here, I wanted to tell her. Welcome. ■

Ryan J. Pemberton is the minister for university engagement at First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley (Calif.).



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Home from Prison

Continued from Page 23

New patterns

In *The Executed God*, theologian Mark Lewis Taylor uses Jesus' arrest, imprisonment, and execution to offer insight into the experiences of what he calls "lockdown America." Likewise, the stories of Jesus coming home from prison can offer insight into the experiences of those coming home today. According to the Bureau of Justice's National Prisoner Statistics Program, between 600,000 and 700,000 people are released from prison each year in the United States. What can we learn from the resurrection about what it might mean to welcome Jesus home well?

In John 21:15-19 Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Peter did not stand by Jesus in his trial and sentencing. Because of this, he and Jesus must have a hard conversation after Jesus is released about what Peter's prior absence means for their relationship going forward. If Peter is willing to follow a formerly incarcerated Lord, the task is simple: "Feed my sheep." But Jesus is quick to acknowledge that simple acts of care will mean that Peter will have to go to places where he is uncomfortable. Following Jesus will ultimately lead Peter to prison. Acknowledging that our Lord has a record does not change the basics of the Christian message, but it does change where one goes and how one acts once there.

Jesus' own patterns of ministry are changed by his experience of death and resurrection, prison and release. In the resurrection stories, we no longer see him going to formal places of worship. Rather, he meets his followers where they are: on the road, at work, in graveyards, and at home.

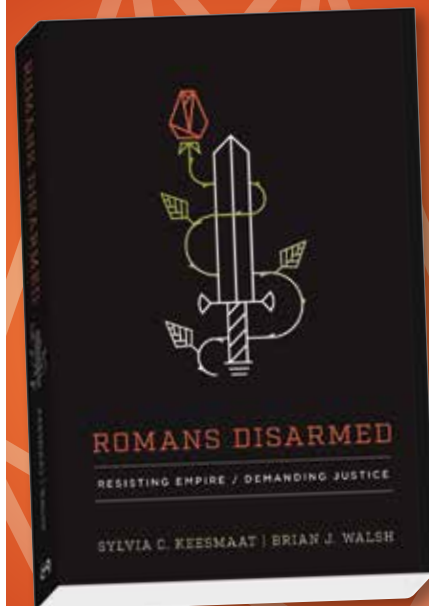
Perhaps following our formerly incarcerated Lord today means that we, like Peter, must learn to go to new places. Like Peter, we must acknowledge when we haven't been there for people in prison, offer friendship despite previously failing to do so, meet basic needs, and learn to be church beyond the walls.

But most important, if we want to follow a God who made it through prison and into the resurrection, we must be willing to change our perceptions and see formerly incarcerated people for who they truly are: not risk, threat, or even thieving gardeners, but images of the Risen Christ. ■

Sarah Jobe is a prison educator through Duke University Divinity School and a prison chaplain through Interfaith Prison Ministry for Women (ipmforwomen.org).

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A formerly enslaved community in Hilton Head, S.C., worked an abandoned Confederate plantation for their own profit.



The Cost of History

TWO OF MY favorite television shows are *Finding Your Roots* with Henry Louis Gates Jr. and *Who Do You Think You Are?* Both shows walk celebrities through the process of discovering their ancestors' stories. I could watch them for hours (and sometimes have).

I love them, but I am also frustrated by them. Because the history of American families is American history, those families' stories inevitably

intersect with major U.S. events: the removal and genocide of Native Americans, slavery, the Salem witch trials, the suffrage movement, prohibition, the great migration, Jim Crow, the list goes on. Usually, these shows give about one minute for celebrities to process their ancestors' roles in these monumental moments, then move on. Celebrities whose ancestors participated in American westward expansion are often celebrated as "pioneers" whose courage and grit helped forge America. Rarely are they guided to understand that their ancestors participated in the removal and genocide of

Indigenous nations who stewarded the same land for tens of thousands of years before Europeans "pioneered" it. Recently, I dug into the story of my third great-grandmother, Lea Ballard, who is the last adult enslaved person in our family. Her daughter, Martha, died while giving birth to my great-grandmother, Elizabeth.

According to our family oral tradition, Elizabeth's older sister, Annie, went into the forest one day to collect firewood. She was followed by one of her uncles, who raped her and left her to die in the rain.

I checked weather records for the Camden, S.C. area and found that, indeed, there was a historic storm in 1908, around the time the rape would have occurred. Rivers overflowed across the state as up to 22 inches of rain fell within a one-week period. Could this be the storm that battered Annie as she suffered violence in the woods?

I imagined Annie lying there among the trees. I imagined the fortitude it took for her to drag her mangled 21-year-old body home in the middle of

that storm. I imagined Lea's pain as she realized one of her sons did this and, months later, Elizabeth's pain as she witnessed her older sister Annie die as she gave birth to a son—just as her own mother had died giving birth to her. The pain is recorded in the 1910 census, in the name Lea gave to her great-grandson: Snake.

I am haunted by these facts. My family story was fundamentally shaped by oppression. Generations of mothers in our family died in childbirth because no hospitals would admit them. Enslaved men were rented to impregnate slave women. What pathologies have state-enforced sexual violence caused within our families? How much healthier would we be if antebellum "breeding" never happened? If family separation and loss never happened? If slavery never happened?

This is the cost of our history—the cost that our families' stories reveal, if we let them. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper is president of FreedomRoad.us and the author of several books, including the forthcoming Fortune, the story of her family and a call for reparations.



I am haunted by these facts.

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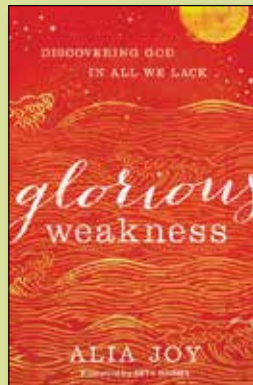
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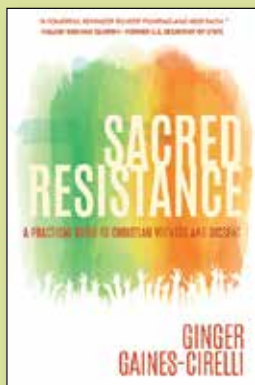


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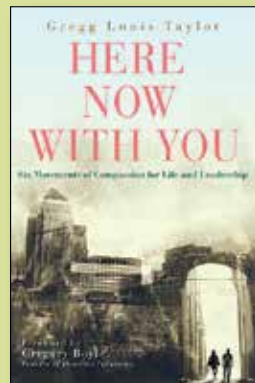


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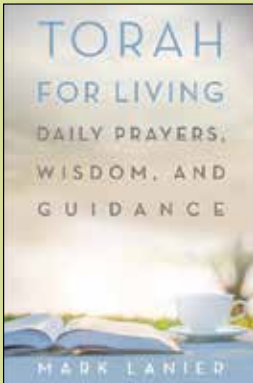


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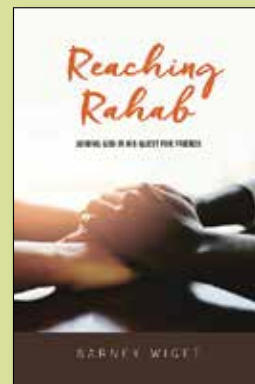


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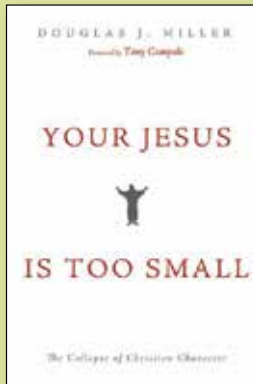


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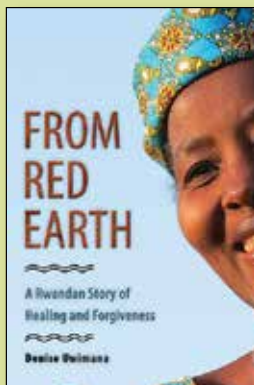


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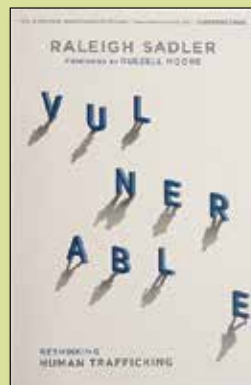
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Denise Uwimana

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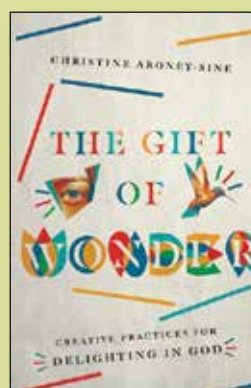
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Belinda Bauman

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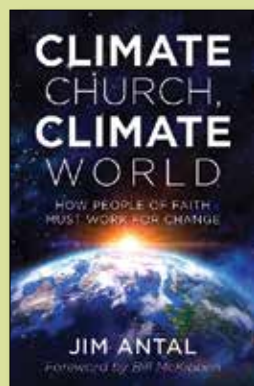
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The Gift of Wonder
Christine Aroney-Sine

What would it look like to embrace a delightful faith? In this book Christine Sine offers fresh spiritual practices that engage all our senses and help us see the wonder and joy that God intends for us.

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Climate Church, Climate World
Jim Antal

Walter Brueggemann: "This is the book for which we have been waiting concerning the climate crisis!" Desmond Tutu: "This book will inspire the courage and conviction people of faith need." Brian McLaren: "Pastors: read this book!" Foreword: Bill McKibben.

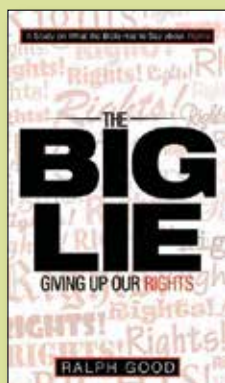
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The Interfaith Family Journal
Susan Katz Miller

This invaluable resource for interfaith families contains exercises and creative activities to help family members decide together how they want to honor their histories, cultures, and beliefs in ways that nurture joy, creativity, and empowerment.

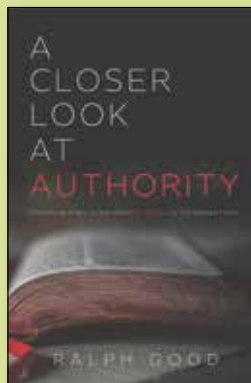
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The Big Lie: Giving Up Our Rights
Ralph Good

The *Big Lie* investigates false teachings that Christians must give up their rights. The Bible condemns those who deny the rights of others as wicked and evil, and praises the righteous who stand up for them.

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A Closer Look at Authority
Ralph Good

A Closer Look at Authority identifies God's purpose, responsibilities, and qualifying characteristics for authority, as well as Satan's misuse thereof. Examines every Greek word "authority" is translated from, seven in the KJV, 12 in the NKJV.

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By Stephanie Sandberg

The United Indecency of **America**

A play gains new significance in a grieving city during troubled times.

PAULA VOGEL WON the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for drama for “How I Learned to Drive” and is a veteran playwright of the American stage. But it wasn’t until 2017 that she finally made her way to Broadway with another of her prize-winning plays: the Tony Award-nominated “Indecent.”

“I wrote it as a love letter to the theater in 2015,” said Vogel, “and I never knew then how the play would resonate as strongly as it does today in these Trumped-up political times.”

“Indecent” tells the story of the theater troupe that performed Sholem Asch’s ill-fated Yiddish play “The God of Vengeance.” Premiering in 1922, “Vengeance” was the first play on Broadway to depict a lesbian love scene, causing a wave of notoriety everywhere it was performed. Asch’s play originated in Poland and tells the story of a Jewish brothel owner’s daughter who falls in love with one of his prostitutes. The father, on discovering his daughter’s forbidden love, throws the Torah down on the stage and banishes his daughter to a life of prostitution.

Asch’s leading actor in Poland warned him not to produce the play, but the play went on a whirlwind tour of success across Europe, finally arriving in New York City’s Greenwich Village in 1922. Despite this, when the show opened on Broadway, it was severely censored. “Why did you agree to those cuts?” the stage manager, Lemml, asks Asch in “Indecent.” “You cut the love between those two girls. There’s only sex left!”

“The God of Vengeance” was shut down, and its actors were arrested and put on trial for obscenity. When found guilty in the New York courts, the immigrant Jewish troupe

“Indecent” runs April 26 through May 19 at the Pittsburgh Public Theater. The Broadway production is available to stream on BroadwayHD.com and Broadway HD’s Amazon channel.

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What You Have Heard Is True



A scene from the Tony-nominated play "Indecent."

their journey through time in the theater.

The Pittsburgh Public Theater decided in 2017 that it would produce "Indecent" as part of its 2018-19 season. Artistic director Marya Sea Kaminski said they were drawn to the play as "a story about resilience and artistic relationships and how they survive in a divided and frightening world. The play's

The Pittsburgh Public Theater's staging of "Indecent" will speak to human love in the face of difficulty.

title says it all. Who draws the dividing line between what is acceptable and unacceptable, decent and "Indecent"?"

"Indecent" is all too relevant in our era of anti-immigration policies, racism, and a remarkable rise in hate crimes—including the massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in October 2018. The play now also bears unfathomable truths in the face of what the Anti-Defamation League called "likely the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in the history of the United States."

Pittsburgh has a long history of Yiddish and Jewish theater, including two productions of "The God of Vengeance," and the Pittsburgh Public Theater is eager to explore that history. It has planned special events, conversations, and discussions in connection with the production of Vogel's play, placing it in the context of the city.

"Everything is reversed now: like a photographic negative," Asch says in "Indecent." "Our garden, our house, the theater, the streets in America feel very far away."

Kaminski hopes that "this play, that holds many diverse ideas, will create a platform for us to come together to talk about our city, our lives together, and use this incredible public democratic forum of the theater to change us for the better."

"Indecent," said Risa Brainin, who is directing the play for the Pittsburgh Public Theater, "is about difficult subject matter, at our most difficult time. It asks questions about love and survival that are hard

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New & Noteworthy



From *The Best of Enemies*

Unity After Division

In the film *The Best of Enemies*, Oscar-nominated actress Taraji P. Henson portrays Christian civil rights activist Ann Atwater. Atwater and a Ku Klux Klan member are from opposite walks of life, but a school desegregation decree surprisingly places them on the same team. STX Entertainment

Healing Narratives

More than 20 years after its original printing, artist and activist Aurora Levins Morales' book *Medicine Stories: Essays for Radicals* is republished with 12 new essays and updates to nine others. Levins Morales shares stories from her social justice-minded life to empower her peers and younger generations. Duke University Press

All Abilities Welcome

According to *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church*, Christians' understanding of healing can disempower persons with disabilities. By exploring the theology of healing narratives, Bethany McKinney Fox offers practical ways to include persons of all abilities in the church. InterVarsity Press

The Sound of Hope

Flooded with resonant strings and warm sound, Carrie Newcomer's 17th solo album, *The Point of Arrival*, is an honest exploration of life's paradoxes. Newcomer's Quaker faith infuses the lyrics with hope even as she writes songs inspired by Christina Blasey Ford's testimony and the 2016 presidential election. Available Light Records

was shipped back to a war-torn Europe and Nazi-occupied Poland. After the war, Asch (who remained in America for a time) refused to allow any further productions of his play, disowning it entirely.

Vogel fell in love with "The God of Vengeance" when she discovered the play in graduate school, consuming it in one sitting in the library stacks and falling in love with the forbidden passion of the love scene—which in her view had "echoes and glimpses of 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

Years later, approached by director Rebecca Taichman, she decided to tell the story of the play and the sacrifices made by its founding artists. "[W]e went through seven years of workshops and rewrites," said Vogel, "but finally found a structure that carries our audience through blinks in time, across continents and eras." The play's remarkable beauty surges in its opening moments as we are introduced to the theater troupe, ashes pouring from their sleeves as they rise to tell us their story, a boisterously expressive klezmer band accompanying



A robot dressed in a nurse uniform carries medical documents at a hospital in Thailand.

Reuters

The Worth of Work

THE AGE OF THE robots is here. If you didn't notice, it's because we're calling them artificial intelligence (AI) and they don't look like we expected. They're the touchscreen kiosk that has replaced the cashier at Panera, the mechanical arms and claws flipping burgers at fast food joints, the drone that may someday deliver your Amazon order. They're the software that can turn a baseball box score or corporate earnings report into a wire service news story.

According to a recent report from the Brookings Institute, about 38 percent of the adult population could be put out of work by smart machines in the next generation.

in the Rust Belt states Trump narrowly won. Yang expects that blue collar alienation will multiply soon, when driverless vehicles replace 3.5 million truck drivers.

His answer to the jobless AI future is a universal basic income (UBI). He would have the U.S. government issue \$1,000 per month to each individual aged 18 to 64. Of course, \$1,000 per adult is not enough to support a household: People would still need to work. To Yang, the UBI payment would simply allow low-wage workers to retain a measure of human dignity and maybe stay out of debt, so they can build toward a better life. That's the Silicon Valley take on the automated future. Science and engineering will continue their single-minded devotion to corporate profit, and those left behind will be paid off with a small bribe.

A far better idea is the federal job guarantee supported by several of the other 2020 presidential candidates. This would do what it says: ensure a job paying at least \$15 per hour plus benefits to any American who is willing to work. In immediate terms, this is a better approach because instead of letting low-wage employers off the hook, it will force them to

compete with the wages, benefits, and working conditions offered by the guaranteed jobs.

The job guarantee also addresses the fact that there is work that desperately needs to be done for the common good and will never turn a profit for the private sector. For example, we need well-paid and well-trained people raising young children and providing early education, making the conversion to clean energy, laying the cable for universal broadband access, and working on farms to raise the food we need in a sustainable system. And that's just a start.

A job guarantee also addresses that fundamental question, "What are people for?" In the end, we're not here just to be entertained on our screens. As St. John Paul II put it in his papal encyclical *Laborem Exercens*: "Work is a duty, because our Creator demanded it and because it maintains and develops our humanity. We must work out of regard for others, especially our own families, but also because of the society we belong to and in fact because of the whole of humanity." ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



Science and engineering will continue their single-minded devotion to corporate profit.

The choices we are making about our AI future depend upon our answer to the question Wendell Berry posed 30 years ago with his book *What Are People For?* Up to now, at least in the U.S., the answer has been that people exist to generate corporate profits.

Andrew Yang, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur running for the Democratic presidential nomination, argues that Donald Trump is president because automation eliminated 4 million manufacturing jobs

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to answer with our brains that want to sort everything out, categorize it all neatly away. But 'Indecent' asks us to answer questions with our hearts."

According to Brainin, the Pittsburgh Public Theater chose "Indecent" because of its relevance as people of certain ethnicities are banned from U.S. shores and forbidden to have a life here. "It resonates with what happened to the Jews in the Holocaust ... we say, 'Oh, this couldn't happen again,' and yet, here we find ourselves, on the potential road to another Holocaust."

The Anti-Defamation League has reported that incidents of anti-Semitism in the U.S. have risen 60 percent since 2016, attributing this sharp increase to the "blood and soil" right-wing rhetoric so popular in the nationalist movement, where Jews are viewed as outsiders and perceived to be infesting the country and diluting the nation's "true heritage." This is happening in Europe as well, with Hungary, Poland, and Italy drifting again toward fascism.

"We all have recognized," said Brainin, "that this could happen again. So, the message is urgent, right here, right now. ... Nothing that anyone can do is going to stop the spirit of the Jewish people and the universal resonance of their stories."

People tried to stop "The God of Vengeance" from ever being seen again—even its playwright tried to stop it—and yet the theater helps it to live on beyond what its writer could have imagined. Asch says, near the end of "Indecent," "I will not let this play be produced. No more. I wrote it in a different time. The time has changed on me."

The time has changed on us all, and we must remember, never forgetting that forgetting these stories will be our demise. In April and May, the Pittsburgh Public Theater's staging of Paula Vogel's work will speak to the resilience of human love and sacrifice in the face of difficulty and darkness.

"I write theater," said Vogel, "so that people will have ears that see and eyes that hear. So that we can go beyond our normal capacities into the realm of feeling with our hearts." ■

Stephanie Sandberg is an assistant professor of theater and film studies at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va.



From *Faces Places*

AN INVITATION TO CHANGE

SOMETHING WONDERFUL is happening in popular cinema: a new psychological depth married to kinetic technique that seems to emerge from filmmakers' willingness to show their vulnerability. Notice how *First Man* is far more than a moon landing epic; it's massively about the heart. *Blindspotting* takes racism more seriously than it takes itself. And *Leave No Trace* doesn't settle for catharsis but invites us to *do* something in response to the brokenness on screen. There are dozens more films like this.

The psychological depth and open vulnerability of these films are mirrored in the way we talk about movies. It's easy to find good film criticism that tells us about the writer's life, and conversation about how cinema interacts with the world is no longer exclusively an elitist game.

But our favorite films don't just tell us what we think about the world: They tell us something about what we think of *ourselves*. If what we pay attention to shows us what we love, it may also show us what we allow to love *us*. It bears exploration: What do our favorite films say about who we are, who we want to be, how we see the world, and what we feel we deserve? What

are they inviting us to become?

What stands out for me is how *Faces Places* shows me how to look at the everyday world and see the miracle of what it really is, *Stories We Tell* shows me how to forgive, *Lone Star* shows me how to not let how I think about the past destroy the future, and *The Fisher King* reminds me that everyone is fighting a difficult battle and deserves empathy. More recently, the mighty housekeeper, Cleo, in *Roma* shows us nothing less than how to love, and in *Never Look Away* we are asked to face everything that life brings, asking if all tragedy invites a choice—even if the choice is limited to the journey of making peace with the life we did not have.

And, most of all, there is the protagonist of *Babette's Feast*, who pours herself out for the sake of a community that needs to wake up. She invites me to be hospitable, both to my own struggles and the beautiful complexities of everyone I meet. I'm asking myself a simple question these days: Who is this film inviting me to *be*? ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and irelandretreats.com.

Reviewed by Kathryn Post

STOP SIDELINING JUSTICE

Becoming a Just Church: Cultivating Communities of God's Shalom, by Adam L. Gustine. InterVarsity Press Books.

MULTICULTURAL churches can still be white spaces. Communities can be inherently individualistic. And acts of “justice” can alienate the very people Christ calls us to serve.

In *Becoming a Just Church: Cultivating Communities of God's Shalom*, Adam L. Gustine points out paradoxes that have dominated the church for centuries. His book casts a prophetic vision of what justice can look like when it is fully embodied in the church.

“I am a liability in the work of justice,” he admits in the opening lines, indicating his white male identity. Aware of his privilege even as he reckons with matters of power and oppression, Gustine offers an unapologetic wake-up call to white evangelicals who have ignored the biblical call to justice and those who already consider themselves “woke.”

“A significant part of our history in evangelicalism could be characterized by either full-frontal assault on society or distancing ourselves in a protectionist way,” he writes. Evangelicals reduce justice to something either done tangentially (for example, donations) or in a manner that echoes colonialism (such as mission trips to foreign countries, depriving local construction workers of their livelihoods).

Moreover, evangelical church models frequently commodify comfort, thrive on sameness, and rely on proximity to power. Churches that market themselves to the privileged by offering state-of-the-art worship experiences or free lattes are sidelining justice; when churches become franchises or strive to capture the aesthetics of cool, they systematically exclude folks on the margins, centering themselves rather than others or the gospel. The result is an individualistic, disengaged, privilege-permeated church where attendees have the luxury of choosing when, if ever, to engage in justice. As Gustine puts it, it's “difficult to convince a consumptive

community to embrace a costly way of life.”

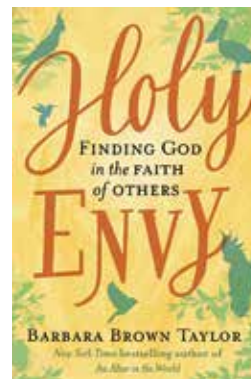
Gustine fleshes out what it might look like for churches to become communities that are distinct from the world—modeling what shalom can look like—while *engaging* in the world, especially at the local level. He calls churches to cast off their “devotion to a privatized, individualistic kind of faith that is distinctly white and Western” and, instead, pursue a communal way of life that prioritizes mutual interdependence.

“For pastors, an important part of the role is blurring the lines between congregation and community.” Part of this line-blurring entails evangelizing and discipling in a way that takes social location into account. For instance, Gustine points out how unhelpful it is for those with privilege to ignore or reject privilege. He urges them to find ways to *distribute* their privilege to those who are disempowered.

Becoming a Just Church articulates a helpful framework for seeking justice but offers few practical steps. Still, Gustine asks readers to confront important, provocative questions such as: “Does an intentional vision for diversity work to reinforce whiteness by pressuring people of color to assimilate?” Each chapter also concludes with specific questions for church leaders to consider, trusting leaders to apply the book's principles to their specific contexts.

Gustine strikes a chord when he writes that “the *distance* we allow between us and the community we are engaging is the extent to which we will fail to truly be for the place God has put us.” Too many churches are creating distance between their sanctuaries and their justice work. Ultimately, when we spurn sacrifice for the sake of comfort, we forget that we serve a God who relinquished comfort, power, and life itself for the sake of humanity. ■

Kathryn Post is an editorial assistant of Sojourners.



Reviewed by Jon Little

A MORE MATURE AND SECURE FAITH

Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others, by Barbara Brown Taylor. Harper One.

IF WE SEEK more than spiritual security—if we long for more than bobble-headed affirmation of our preconceived beliefs—we must step out of our cloistered faith and engage the strangers all around us. This is the message at the center of spiritual memoirist and best-selling author Barbara Brown Taylor's *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*.

After leaving behind her clerical collar and post as an Episcopal priest, Taylor took up the call to teach. For nearly 20 years, she taught introductory classes on

If we heed Taylor's call to expand our circle, we might head toward a faith worth envying.

world religion at a small college in northern Georgia. Early on, her aims were relatively meager. To introduce her students to a few of the world's great religions, acquaint them with the diversity of faiths that exist not just across the globe but right across the street—this seemed enough. And so she outlined Buddhism's eightfold path. She explicated the doctrinal differences between Sunni and Shia Islam and taught her students what exactly made a kosher meal kosher.

It didn't take Taylor long to realize that

though literature and secondhand knowledge can teach much, it is through direct interaction with people of other faiths that we learn the most about their faiths and our own. When Taylor stepped out from behind the lectern and took her students on field trips to *masjids* (mosques) and temples, she learned that her view of God and faith was partial. On these trips, she often found her faith tested and was, on more than one occasion, totally smitten.

Taylor calls the feelings of awe, inspiration, and longing that overtook her when she witnessed the best of another's faith "holy envy." For instance, when an imam bid her class farewell, not with a call to conversion or a reminder of the many stereotypes the West harbors against Islam, but by expressing his desire that her students become the very best people that they could be, be they Christian or Jew, Buddhist or Hindu.

For those Christians who fear that engaging with other religious traditions may lead them astray, Taylor pulls no punches. She acknowledges that standing humbly before the mystery of God and faith in all its variegated forms may disillusion you. In fact, she goes a step further and says that such disillusionment is to be expected. But she also insists that approaching other faiths in a spirit of genuine humility need not drive us to abandon our faith altogether. Taylor argues persuasively that engaging with others and their faiths may, in fact, bring us to a faith more mature and secure in the fathomless mysteries of life and God. She suggests it may also bring us to a faith less focused on exclusionary beliefs and creeds than on what she calls "the monumental spiritual challenge" of loving God through the people before us—no matter how unlike us they may appear.

If Taylor is correct and we heed her call to expand our circle of neighborly concern to those of other religious traditions, we might find ourselves on that long and winding road toward a faith finally worth envying. And if we find ourselves on that road, we should not be surprised when we come across fellow travelers that aren't Christian. The road may be narrow, but it's wide enough for travelers of many faiths. ■

Jon Little is a freelance writer in Nashville, Tenn. You can find more of his writing at mindfuldaddy.com.

Reviewed by Wendy Besel Hahn

THE DEMANDS OF HER **WITNESS**

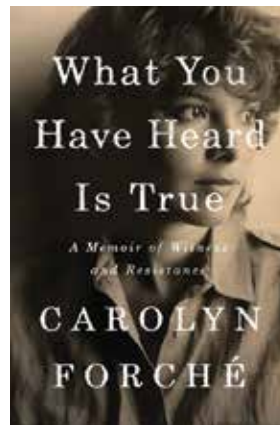
***What You Have Heard Is True: A Memoir of Witness and Resistance*, by Carolyn Forché. Penguin Press.**

CAROLYN FORCHÉ'S story begins more than 40 years ago, when the then-27-year-old poet opens her apartment door in California to a stranger from El Salvador. Leonel Gómez Vides—"Leonel," as she refers to him throughout her book—spends several days outlining the situation in his country and making his case for Forché to come witness the roots of a revolution.

That Forché accepts such a calling, from January 1978 through March 1980 and for more than 40 years beyond, attests not only to her grit but also to her belief in the sanctity of the human spirit and the power of truth.

An awakening usually connotes a positive state of consciousness, yet Forché's experience calls her to a grim, nightmarish landscape. Once her plane touches down in Ilopango, El Salvador, she ventures into a world in which nearly one in 10 children dies before the age of 5 and 80 percent of the population has no running water, electricity, or sanitation. To read Forché's rich prose is to travel alongside her through the jungle, where she learns to squat over open pits to relieve herself, and follow her into palatial, private quarters, where she washes away the filth of the road before meeting with the military and civic leaders who want her dead. Beyond the poverty, the country devolves into a hell wherein mutilated bodies appear in the streets and political prisoners are kept in small cages, like animals.

Her status as a U.S. citizen simultaneously acts as magnet for and amulet against violence in a country dependent on the U.S. for aid at a time when El Salvador's human rights violations are under scrutiny. At one



Carolyn Forché's memoir marks the culmination of a lifetime of activism.

point, her presence alongside a photographer prevents a massacre of villagers who have sought asylum in a Catholic church. Those familiar with liberation theology will appreciate how her life is most vulnerable when Salvadoran officials believe she is a nun. Archbishop Oscar Romero tells her to leave El Salvador just one week before he is gunned down while celebrating Mass for the repose

of a woman's soul.

Following her March 1980 departure, Forché continues to chronicle "a civil war that claimed nearly 100,000 lives, with 8,000 people disappeared, 500,000 internally displaced, and another 500,000 taking refuge in other countries." Reading *What You Have Heard Is True* during a U.S. government shutdown over southern border security enlightened me about the desperation driving asylum seekers to flee their homes.

Memoirs often cover a slice of life, but Forché's marks the culmination of a lifetime of activism, which includes cataloguing photographs of the disappeared, as well as harboring a member of the death squads in her home while he testifies before members of Congress. Her witness demands an examination of the role the U.S. government plays in destabilizing other countries.

Perhaps most importantly, Forché's act of writing becomes a source of healing for those Salvadorans who have fled the violence of their country, as she proclaims to the world: What you have heard is true. ■

Wendy Besel Hahn (wendybeselhahn.com) lives in Reston, Va., and writes about faith, family, and politics.



'Your Young Will See Visions...'

FOR A SOCIETY already divided along race, class, and gender lines, the emerging divisions between young and old may become another crucial fracture—one that could sap our ability to make change. Or, if we understood it just a little differently, that fracture could heal in a way that strengthened our society.

You can see this division on many fronts. As the enormous and lucky Boomer generation has moved through our society, it has done a good deal of grabbing: Grabbing of

the whole, we'll be the first generation to leave the world a worse place than we found it. Climate change, of course, is the perfect example: We've literally filled the atmosphere with so much carbon that we're changing the operation of the planet. California has turned from golden idyll into smoke-choked danger zone; we've raised the oceans and melted the glaciers.

And—as practically every poll indicates—we're the generation least likely to care about it all, the most likely to vote for those who maintain the impossible status quo. That "funny" sticker on the back of all those RVs? The one that says, "I'm spending my kids' inheritance"? Truer words were never stuck to chrome.

BUT THAT'S NOT everyone. I've been heartened to see what a chord, say, Greta Thunberg struck with lots of people of all ages when she launched her school strikes in Europe. I've been thrilled to watch lots of older people get excited by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her Green New Deal. I think people are realizing that their generation may have dropped the ball, but that it's still possible for us to use our remaining strength, money, skills, and passion in the job of backing up our juniors.

For Christians, this seems especially easy. We're conditioned to the

idea that change might come from the young: "And a child shall lead them," we recall each Christmas Eve, as we pay homage to a man who died before he would have been old enough to, say, run for president in the U.S. As with following Jesus, following people younger than we are requires submerging one's ego a little. Not dropping one's critical faculties: Following blindly is almost as dumb as leading blindly. But dropping one's sense that one should always be in charge.

It can be fun, too. I helped start 350.org, which became the first big planet-wide climate campaign. I was nearing 50, but all my co-conspirators were still in college. I'm still twice the age of almost everyone on the staff. Sometimes that's hard (on them too, especially when they're trying to get me to use some new piece of technology). Mostly it feels right. Reaching across divides is always a good idea, and this one is easier than most, since we were all young once and since we're all, if we're lucky, going to get old. ■

Following younger people requires submerging one's ego.

money, as Boomers who grew up in an era of rising wages and cheap houses consolidated a relatively strong financial position. (You may not feel rich, but if you're secure that looks awfully nice to Millennials struggling with college debt and living four to a sublet.) Grabbing of attention: For decades every company catered to the buying power of the generation, and even now its politicians are reluctant to surrender the stage.

It would be one thing if we Boomers had used the strong economic decades of our early lives to help make society stronger and more resilient. There's much to be proud of: the civil rights and women's movements, for instance. But on

Above, U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) hold a news conference for their proposed Green New Deal to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in 10 years.



Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, is the author of the forthcoming *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?* (April 2019).

Somewhere Children Do Not Play at War

You can't blame me for flinching
back against the wall
when a small boy points his
pistol at me and yells "Pow! Pow! Pow!"

I am lying back there somewhere
feeling the sidewalk as if I'd never touched
sunshine, pumping out my urgent
puddle

And when three kids dash by, invisible
in their camouflage sneakers,
chattering on their walkie talkies,
pay no attention if I button my opinion
and pocket my fingerprints

I crouch somewhere in a black, sweaty
silence too small for me,
listening to voices muffled by cinderblocks
or years

And when I wake this morning
to jubilant cries, and look out to see twins
in miniature green berets waiting
while a man in uniform
unlocks the station wagon,
forgive me if I drop the curtain and start
smuggling my unborn children across the border

Somewhere I am waiting for my daughter
to come home, holding grief in
like one who holds a breath too long
under water

Stephen Wing is a board member at Nuclear Watch South in Atlanta and author of the eco-comic novel Free Ralph! Illustration by Steven Spazuk



The Lamb at the Center

THE BOOK OF REVELATION is one of our companions this Eastertide. We are invited to contemplate its central image, the axis around which everything revolves: “the Lamb at the center of the throne” (7:17).

Is this an image that can engage the imaginations of our contemporaries, especially those unfamiliar with the scriptural symbolism? In 2016, I had my tattooist in New Zealand inscribe on the inside of my right forearm a striking copy of a medieval sculpture, one of the few that survive from the great Abbey of Cluny in France. It depicts the Lamb of God, bearing a cross. The Latin inscription surrounding it means, “As carved here the Lamb of God is small, but how great he is in heaven!”

I hadn’t anticipated that bearing this image on my body would lead to all sorts of intriguing conversations. Curious strangers stop me in checkout lines, bars, the beach, the street, asking, “What does that mean?” I talk about the vulnerability of God’s noncoercive love, and its ultimate power. Nothing can take away the sins of the world except the love that is

revealed on the cross and vindicated in the resurrection. “Here is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world!” (John 1:29).

Are these conversations sowing seeds of change? Only God knows. As for ourselves, we are still learning from the scripture’s insistence that the ultimate meaning of the Lamb is only accessible through adoration.



Martin L. Smith, an Episcopal priest, is an author, preacher, and retreat leader. He lives in Washington, D.C.

[MAY 5]

Belonging to the Way

Acts 9:1-20; Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

THE ACCOUNT IN Acts 9 of the radiant appearance of the risen Lord to Saul on the Damascus road has bequeathed us a proverbial expression for sudden insight that shatters one’s worldview: “And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored” (9:18). Saul gets up and is baptized because he now knows for himself what the men and women he was rounding up as criminals had been claiming: The crucified felon Jesus is the Messiah of God and is gloriously alive. This was no sacrilegious oxymoron, a vulnerable and persecuted savior! Now Christ is wholly identified with his intimates, in their vulnerability and defenselessness, and had posed that life-changing question in person: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Through baptism Saul becomes one of them, and Christ becomes his new identity. “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

Revelation also presents the mystery of divine vulnerability incarnate through the imagery of the glorified “Lamb that was

slaughtered” (5:12). The symbolism of sacrifice is utterly revolutionized. Sacrifice is not something demanded from us but the pivotal self-offering of God given to us and for us!

In the fourth gospel, John recounts the impulsive decision of Peter to return to Galilee to relaunch the boat he had abandoned a few years earlier, trying his hand once more at fishing. Peter would not be the first to rely on something deeply familiar to help in the process of recovering from shock. The genial stranger who calls from the shore has a practical suggestion about where to catch that elusive shoal of fish, and he seems to have breakfast going already on a little fire. Later when it comes to a one-on-one conversation with the Lord, the overwhelming shame that Peter feels over his threefold denial (see John 18:13-27) is tenderly healed. Expressing his love for Jesus is all that matters, and the opportunity to take the responsibility for nurturing and caring for the ones whom Christ calls his own: “Feed my sheep” (21:17).

[MAY 12]

Living into Heaven

Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

OUR EASTERTIDE meditation on being caught up into the risen life takes us to John 10, where Jesus’ baffled opponents are again subjecting him to interrogation. The scene is winter, during the celebration of Hanukkah. Jesus is walking in the temple portico, which offers shelter from the bitter winds blowing from the east. Bleak weather suggests the real question hovering over any claim to religious revelation: How does it stand up to the inevitability of death, which threatens to cut down all achievements, silence every voice, take everything with it into the lifeless dark? Jesus offers eternal life to all whom Abba God gives him. “The Father and I are one” (10:30). No metaphysical theories about souls and their immortality bear any weight here. Intimate belonging to God alone is what death is powerless to dissolve. “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand” (10:28).

We who are committed to action for social justice do well to explore this understanding of the good news of resurrection as deeply as we can. Our critique of politically reactionary versions of Christianity that focus entirely on getting souls to a heaven carries certain risks. A prophetic understanding of the reign of God that calls for transforming social institutions can trap us in indifference to the promise of eternal life in union with God. It takes maturity to realize the more we embrace the revelation that each and every single human being is intrinsically eligible for eternal union with God in the communion of saints, then the more passionately we feel that all deserve living conditions here and now that support and enhance their God-endowed dignity and freedom.

The vision in Revelation 7 proclaims a God who will ultimately restore and heal all whose lives have been blighted by deprivation, injustice, persecution, and scorn: “The One who is on the throne will shelter them” (verse 15).

"The Angel Troubling the Pool,"
c.1845, by J.M.W. Turner



[MAY 19]

Sacred Epiphanies

Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6;
John 13:31-35

I OFTEN WONDER whether those who practice the ministry of spiritual direction in the church, listening for hundreds of hours to firsthand accounts of religious experience, are in a better position to understand the scriptures than many academic experts on the texts. In Acts we read Luke's account of a vision that comes to Peter—a whole variety of animals offered to him as food, shockingly including all those strictly banned by the dietary rules of Torah. Spiritual guides well know that the phenomenon of the "dream that changes everything" is not as rare as some might think. A few years ago, I had an artist inscribe my left shoulder with a splendid tattoo that paid tribute to a life-changing dream I had as a young man, a dream that was mysteriously resumed and completed in a second experience in middle age. Peter's consciousness was inscribed by his intense experience in Joppa, so vivid and compelling that it burst his religious

system to pieces, a system based on scrupulously dividing the clean from the unclean, us from them, ours from theirs, sacred from profane. In Peter's dream, the voice from heaven drives home the revolutionary implications of the gospel: "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." But we know it took Peter time to bring his day-to-day actions in line with his changed consciousness.

Then again, the best interpreters of this scripture for today are those who are in the throes of claiming for themselves, in the power of the Spirit, their God-given cleanness in a world (and, for many, in a church) that has pronounced them profane: profane for what is speciously called race, profane for sexual orientation, profane for caste, profane for all manner of "otherness." All other exegetical expertise must cede authority to the controversial firsthand testimony of those who are experiencing the risen Christ de-profaning them here and now, creating epiphanies of their sacredness.

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

[MAY 26]

Troubled Waters Heal

Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67;
Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 5:1-9

WHO CAN EXPLAIN the unexpected force by which a work of art surprises us, even rocks our world? Why did a single watercolor in an exhibition of paintings by the 19th century visionary artist J.M.W. Turner move me to tears? It was a scene of wild weather in the Alps, but the title is "The Angel Troubling the Pool." There's the tiny figure of the angel, getting into a pool of standing water to stir it up as people wait nearby for healing. Strange that Turner transposed the scene of this week's gospel, the pool of Bethzatha (the name according to some early manuscripts), to the Swiss Alps! But I cried and seemed to hear a voice repeating, "only the troubled waters heal." The story of Jesus healing the paralytic seems to have had a profound effect on the imagination from the earliest days. Certain scribes couldn't resist adding some details: Older translations included a fourth verse, "for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had" (John 5:4).

Jesus is depicted here as simultaneously troubler and healer. Jesus troubles the paralyzed man by confronting his rationalized inertia; he endangers the man by setting him up as a troublemaker in the eyes of the Judean authorities; he stirs up trouble for himself, as the healing incident inflames the authorities' determination to hound him down as a sabbath-breaker who called "God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God" (John 5:18).

John has profound insight into the inevitably controversial nature of God's embodied action in the world. It challenges the entire piety linked with that verse in Psalm 23: "He leads me beside still waters." Not so. The healing action of God in the world takes place in troubled waters, and the healed reveal their health by their readiness to make trouble for the powers that be, the powers that stultify and repress. ■

Look to the East, and Don't Look Back

SUMMER VACATION planning has begun, and it's time to choose which parts of the country to avoid—or drive through under cover of darkness—in our hybrid car bearing D.C. license plates, a combination that tends to inflame a variety of tribal prejudices.

Drivers of gas-guzzling cars get peevish when more responsible vehicles pass them on the highway (my Prius is old *but moves like the wind!*), and the D.C. tags immediately invoke ire. Leaving nothing to chance in its efforts to make residents afraid to leave the city, the District of Columbia also emblazoned the phrase “End Taxation Without Representation” on its license plates. This lets hinterlanders know—if they had any doubt—that we hold the Constitution and its authors in lesser regard. To put it bluntly: We're whiney. (At this point, I'll simply note the injustice of hav-



pulls alongside at a traffic signal. (The Bud Light hat I hastily grab from the glove compartment may confer hinterland authenticity, but the NPR sticker on the back window gives me away every time.)

Fortunately, in our travels we have found national parks to be neutral ground, the formidable beauty sufficient to distract visitors from reading license plates or glaring at people stepping from their electric cars without MAGA hats. So it pains me that one of our nation's greatest landmarks is now off-limits to self and kin.

Along with natural wonders, I recently learned, Yellowstone National Park also encompasses one of the largest active volcanoes in the world. This was a surprise to me, since it doesn't look like other volcanoes, the cone-shaped ones presumably filled with baking soda and dangerous only if teenage vandals pour in vinegar.

In Yellowstone, the primary evidence of volcanic activity are geysers, where super-heated water periodically shoots up into the air. What tourists may not realize, as they stand outside the protective rope line, is that the heat is coming from a cauldron of molten rock 125 miles inside the earth—like

gassiness from bad Tex-Mex—and has the potential for a burp that could take out half the continental land mass of the United States and spew volcanic ash that could block out the sun for weeks. Which means the protective rope line should probably start somewhere east of Memphis, maybe behind a Cracker Barrel.

IN THE PAST 16 million years, Yellowstone has erupted on average every 600,000 years, and the last eruption spread pulverized rock over what are now the 19 states west of the Mississippi. Not to mention parts of western Canada and northern Mexico. (It would have taken out the wall, too.) Fortunately for us, 600,000 years is a long time, with little bearing on modern life. Except that the last eruption was 630,000 years ago. It was catastrophic, and—I'm pausing here for dramatic music, perhaps some rolling timpani—it's overdue.

Being a well-read person, you probably already knew about Yellowstone's volcanic history and may have recently visited despite the risks. A visit no doubt marked by nervous hikes through scenic vistas, rushed selfies, hurried bathroom breaks, and anxious urgings to the kids: “Okay, great geyser, now get in the car!” (“But Dad, I can't find the dog ...” “LEAVE HIM!”) And then finally exhaling with relief when you crossed back over the Indiana state line. Because when Yellowstone erupts, Indianapolis is about as close as you want to be.

Which is why I'll be vacationing on the Atlantic coast this summer. Or maybe camping in West Virginia. (Is there an East Virginia? My license plate might get a pass there.) ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

You won't turn into a pillar of salt.
Ash maybe.

ing no vote in Congress, although few want to read that in the parking lot of a Cracker Barrel.)

Over the years, I have given up trying to reassure incensed people on the road that, whatever their complaint about the nation's body politic, it isn't my fault. But they can't hear me at highway speeds—even when I shout through an open window—and I haven't perfected my shoulder shrug to communicate, “Hey, I just live there.” Worse still, there is no effective counter to the axiomatic efficiency of another driver's middle finger.

Nor can I smugly enjoy my car's smaller carbon footprint, particularly when being tailgated by a Ford 150 quad cab with a gun rack. Feeling superior only lasts until he

A close-up photograph of three hands of different skin tones cupping a small, red, fabric heart with a blue embroidered border. The hands are positioned in a way that they appear to be holding the heart gently. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

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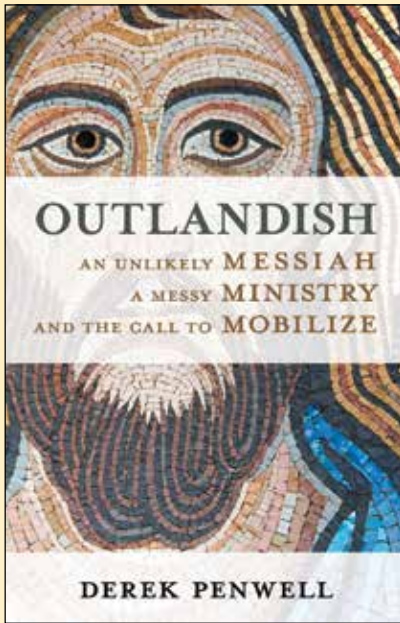
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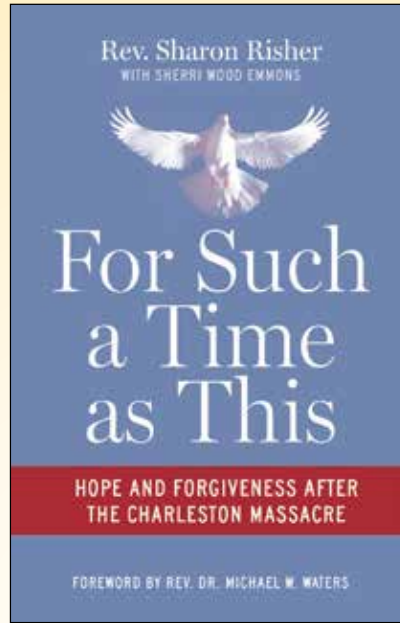
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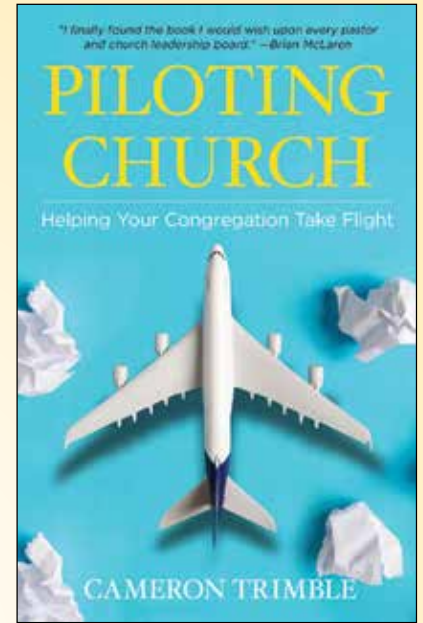
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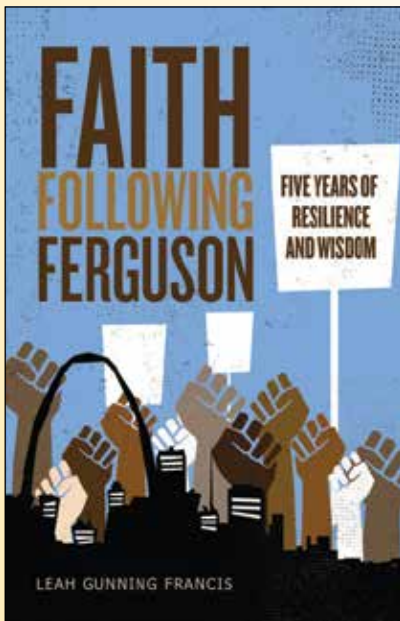
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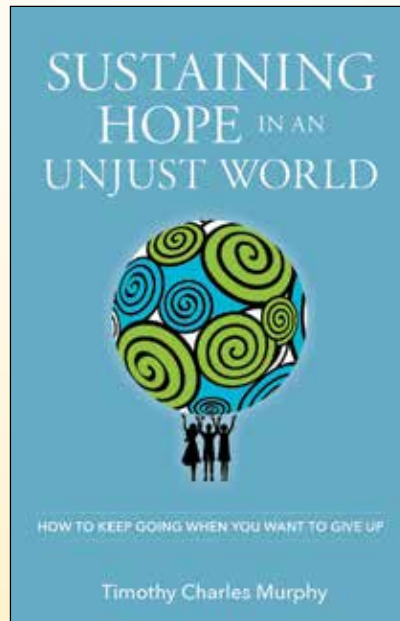
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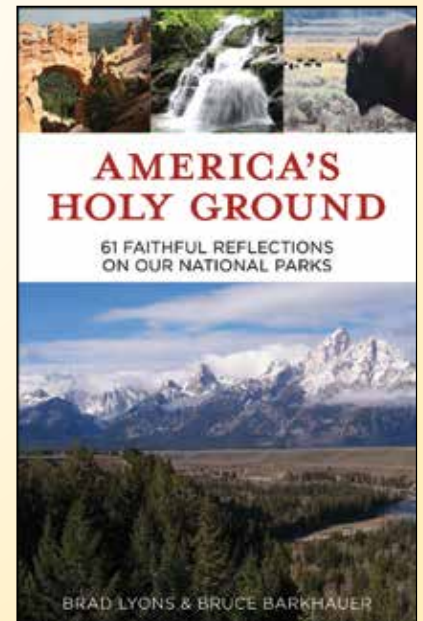
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